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A socio-rhetoric analysis of Farid Esack's Islamic Liberation Theology as expounded in Quran liberation and pluralism

by

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> Hospitality, and hospitality is a very general name for all our relations to the Other, has to be re-invented at every second, it is something without a pre-given rule. That is what we have to invent - a new language for instance. When two people who don't speak the same language meet, what should they do? They have to translate, but translation is an invention, to invent a new way of translating in which translation doesn't simply go one way but both ways, and how can we do that? (Derrida, 1997)

In a world steeped in individualism, certain ostensibly personal achievements or accomplishments often serve merely to reinforce a subtle yet crucial aspect of late capitalist alienation. It seems to blind most of us to the vast contributions ordinary folk make, through their labour, dreams, fortitude, humour and conversations to the exclusive life of privilege and opportunity they are ultimately denied.

In a capitalist society the ceremonies that mark 'individual accomplishments' are often no more than the ideological rituals by which the system rewards docile compliance. At several levels, these events serve to reinforce a form of being and knowing articulated through a crass individualism that undermines most of the noble objectives of authentic creative freedom, vivacious agonistic equality and caring fraternity.

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Nonetheless, this stage of my journey, the completion of a MA dissertation, represents one of the countless mutually supported threads in the grand texture of the interwoven life. Along the way support inevitably comes from system stalwarts prompted by professional, utilitarian and/or even moral concerns. Such support, often vital, is largely instrumental and perfunctory. I try, however, not to lose sight of the countless ordinary moments and personalities whose contributions are marginalized, even obliterated, by the syntax of the dominant cultural language. Here, in my simple provenance, on the fringes of gloss, far from the metropoles of pomp, through the web of reciprocal care, succour comes from a realizable dream we share as

we dance defiantly against the desolated tracts of sub human existence engendered by a relentless soul-consuming capitalist machine. This experience offers a lot more than instrumental perfunctory commodified support. It prefigures and foretells, as it inspires, with profound encompassing magnanimity the realisable alternative.

To all those who have, directly and indirectly, caringly shared the journey with me to this point please accept my heartfelt gratitude.

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Abstract

This dissertation undertakes a socio-rhetoric analysis of Esack's ILT as conveyed in his book Quran, Liberation and Pluralism.

Having arrested the inevitable ironies and nuances of his venture, Esack describes the objective of his enterprise as the freedom to rethink the meaning of scripture to advance the liberation of all people. This noble desideratum was, as this dissertation will demonstrate, severely trammelled, if not undermined, by several subjective proclivities and idiosyncratic impulses. A socio-rhetoric analysis explores the mutually defining and modifying dynamics of the relationship between discourse and history.

Esack's ILT, because it purports to be based on the Quran, requires several strenuous manoeuvres and strategic devices. This entails 1] a hermeneutics, a legitimate way of reading the Quran, which is logically and theologically tenable, 2) keys, a codification of theory expected to streamline the dialogue between the Quran and political struggle, 3] a plausibility structure that helps to define or redefine legitimate authority, history, modes of struggle, historically and ethically feasible systemic alternatives, and, crucially for a located Esack, the bases for determining friends and foes.

Esack's apprehension of the socio-rhetoric landscape he had to negotiate inclined him to adopt a particular version of context-bound hermeneutics. He chooses to elaborate and substantiate this choice by, implicit and explicit, recourse to inchoate notions of relativism, constructivism, subjectivity, history, text and context. Esack's approach, however, is not conceptually and theoretically rigorous and as a consequence his hermeneutics has to rely on several tenuous and *aporetic* theoretical positions.

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The keys, condensing/distilling certain theological and methodological elements, represent a pragmatic attempt to expedite the hermeneutic praxis. Notwithstanding their air of novelty and theoretical potential, the keys can also be construed as being at times merely a direct translation of the anti-apartheid populist slogans such as 'unity/tauhid', 'the people/al-nas', and 'struggle/jihad' into Arabic.

Esack's plausibility structure aims to rescue by means of etymology and archaeology a non-reified inclusivist Islam committed to a 'just' alternative to apartheid SA. He tries to achieve this by rearticulating or perhaps resuscitating the 'original' meanings of the key signifiers Islam, *iman*, *din*, and *kufr*. Esack's efforts prove to be plausible. However, in his scramble, he opts to marginalise, rather brashly, the rich intertextual legacy of the Quran. Esack's excessive dependence on floating signifiers in his general discourse introduces another area of concern. This problem, particularly as seen from a subaltern liberatory perspective, is encapsulated in the ease with which his political rhetoric and calculus capitulated to the ANC's neoliberal juggernaut.

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This study had two foci. One, the conceptual coherence of Esack's theoretical undertaking. Two, the consonance between his political calculus and the structures and methods [molar and molecular aspects] of everyday subaltern praxis locally and globally. The purpose of the study is to sustain the progressive momentum generated by Esack's work through rigorous intellectual engagement. Notwithstanding the individualism of the dominant ideology, it is not about individuals. Rather, it is about two basic persons, within the complex language of the ordinary, vigorously, fallibly, and fondly, trying to make a constructive contribution to the ongoing subaltern struggle, conversation and quest for a more humane, meaningful and beautiful world for all.

As with any study of this nature, inconsistencies and lacuna are identified and critiqued. To minimise the outflow of nuance, the terrain of this study is historically and bio-politically delineated. Esack's work, naturally, is visceral and cerebral. The context to which the central thrust of QLP responds was highly charged and oft times swirling with bewildering exigencies. As a consequence of this scenario, the shadow of the visceral, understandably, though not excusably, often eclipsed the subtleties of the cerebral Esack was struggling to enunciate.

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Introduction

Setting the scene

> The 'post-2015 agenda' is a chance to usher in a new era in international development – one that can eradicate extreme poverty and lead to a world of prosperity, peace, sustainability, equity and dignity for all. Collectively, we need to grasp this historic opportunity to transform our economies and societies. (UNDG: A Million Voices; 2013; iii)

> Today's problems transcend borders; even in the richest countries, there can be destitution and exclusion. Universality implies that all countries will need to change, each with its own approach, but each with a sense of the global common good. Universality is the core attribute of human rights and intergenerational justice. It compels us to think in terms of shared responsibilities for a shared future. It demands policy coherence. Universality embodies a new global partnership for sustainable development in the spirit of the UN Charter. (UN: Road to Dignity by 2030; 2014; 14)

As the global zeitgeist shifts from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) paradigm to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1] and the Global Public Goods (GPGs) frame, a strange affinity obtains. From the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the World Social Forum (WSF)[2] and egalitarian grassroots initiatives like the

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[1] Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) brings an opportunity to discuss the world's response to global challenges and to rethink positions on Global Public Goods (GPGs). One of the transformational impacts that the acceleration of globalisation has had is that it has brought to the fore a class of development challenges characterised by the fact that they require collective action to have any chance of success. It is this characteristic, the need for a united response, which means that the concept of GPGs has a key contribution to make to current debates about the future positioning of the UN system. (Development Dialogue; 2015).

[2]The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth. (WSF Charter, 2001)

Zapatistas, globalization[3] has become a compelling yet paradoxical 'floating signifier'[4]. The aporetic[5] nature of globalization has disarmed and chastened the tyranny of binary logic and the pervasive cultural and epistemic legacy of modernity/coloniality[6] it connotes. Although it unites and divides, it also urges the peoples of the world to participate in a 'Globalectic'[7]colloquium. Ngugi coined the term 'Globalectics' from "globe" and "dialectics" to theorise exchanges between and among nations and cultures. As a complement and enhancement to globalectics we add the notion of the decolonial/transmodern (henceforth decolonial and transmodern used interchangeably). Dussel (2013, 471) expounds:

> A "transmodern" project posits a new globality as a full realization of future humanity, where all cultures (not only those of Europe or North America) will be able to affirm

[3] 'Global capitalism parades as globalization. Globalization holds out the probability of world poverty worsening along with repressive measures against those who suffer most. It also holds out the possibility of resistance against these forces.'(Eisenstein, 2004, 3). This definition offered by a protagonist of the WSF is also affirmed albeit grudgingly by international agencies such as the UN and WB through their endorsement of the MDGs, SDGs and GPGs thought frame. Kwame Anthony Appiah points out, globalization is a "threat to homogeneity" as much as a medium for it (2007; 101). Derrida notes "everywhere it takes place without taking place, it is for better and for worse."(2003; 121-123)

[4] Laclau calls "floating signifiers," those signifiers that are open to continual contestation and articulation to radically different political projects.

[5] Adapting the ancient philosophical term ἀπορία (Greek: no way out) Gerhard Schwarz (2005) applies it thus: An aporetic conflict or aporia is a situation which fulfills three criteria: (1) Two or more opposing positions (which is trivially true for every conflict) (2) Both/all sides are right (this implies that Aporias are outside classical logic) and (3) both/all sides depend on each other: no side can exist without the other. The combination of all three criterions make Aporias intractable. It also presents an opportunity for 'metanoia'. Ossimitz and Lapp [2006] sum up: "Aporias are apparently logically impossible – nevertheless they occur quite often in practical life" (Vlk and Ossimitz, 2011). In Hannah Arendt's work (1978, 193), aporia becomes the very condition of possibility for thinking our key concepts anew. Aporetic thinking becomes crucial particularly in times of crises when one can no longer rely on existing rules or laws to "tell the right from wrong, beautiful from ugly". Under these conditions, aporetic thinking can have a "liberating effect" on the faculty of judgment, which, according to Arendt, is "the most political of man's abilities," as it helps us decide in the absence of given rules under which a particular case or phenomenon can be subsumed. I, however, use the term aporia in a more critical sense in how I apply it to my argument throughout the dissertation. See footnote number 41, pg. 50

[6] Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations; such domination is produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system. (Grosfoguel; 2009; 5-7)

[7] "Globalectics combines the global and the dialectical," writes Ngugi, "to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space that's rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region. Globalectics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension, and motion" providing a useful way of "thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalization." (wa Thiongo; 2012; 8)

> their alterity, and not simply echo a process of "modernization" that implies the imposition upon them of the Euro– North American culture of the center.

In accordance with the usage of authors such as Dussel (2002, 2013); Alcoff (2012), Grosfoguel (2008) and Kuecker (2014) the transmodern represents both 'a theoretical position within post-colonial critical theory and a lived reality' (Kuecker; 2014). As a theoretical position, it seeks a conceptual escape from the modern world-system through the transcendence of the Western epistemic. As a lived experience, 'the lived condition of highly marginalized, exploited, and repressed peoples – what Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) term 'the multitude' – constitutes a transmodern ontology, a way of being human that transcends the modern world-system and generates its own ways of seeing and thinking' (Kuecker; 2014).

Apart from exposing the universal pretentions of modernity/coloniality, the decolonial/transmodern also insists that

> …we begin to recognize, and incorporate within utopian revisions, the simple fact that non-elites contribute to the production, development, and dissemination of critical thought, and that, in many cases, the best radical ideas of authoritative discourses are expressions of the intellectual ferment sowed from "below," in the subjugated spaces of the culture (Alcoff: 2012; 8).

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In line with the Socio-Rhetoric (SR) discursive milieu engendered by the SDGs, Globalectics and the decolonial/transmodern moment, this dissertation explores the prospects of a dialogue between Islamic Liberation Theology (ILT), subaltern praxis and decoloniality. While decoloniality, as an academic discipline, seems to have attained prominence around the 1990s, the concerns and questions that describe its basic paradigm such as epistemology, concrete universalization, 'truth in parentheses', pluriversality. etc. were part of the subaltern discourse long before (Cabral, 1966; Cesaire, 1950; Fanon, 1961; Freire, 1968; Grosfoguel, 2012). The aspect of decolonial critique this dissertation will emphasise is the epistemic/theoretical field. It will thus be mindful of the metaphors and relations that shape our institutions and imaginations, so as to open spaces for the listening of the voices from the outside of modernity

(such as Chinese, Southeast Asian, Hindu, Islamic, Bantu, Latin American) and beyond the 'elite'. More specifically, and to optimise the effects of such an exchange, the dialogue here will be refracted through Esack's Quran based version of ILT[8]. Esack has and still shares a complex relationship with the Quran. There are clear visceral and cerebral aspects. It is a source of emotional consolation and an ethical compass. The Quran features avowedly as a central matrix for the development of Esack's character and conceptual thought.

Why Esack's ILT

Esack is chosen because, unlike other prominent English speaking proponents (Dabashi, Soroush, Engineer) of ILT, who mainly deploy the Quran rhetorically or incidentally, he emphatically posits the Quran as the principal discursive matrix and motivation for his unfolding ILT and diligently attempts to develop a coherent systematic text-compliant exegesis thereof (Esack; 1997; 82).

Esack purportedly proceeds attentively from the text to construct his arguments for inter-faith solidarity against oppression. Because he plays around with the notions of text and context, agency and structure (1997; 13, 73), without theorising these relationships, it is unclear whether his hermeneutics is an attempt to domesticate (eisegesis) the text for political expedience or interrogate (exegesis) it for human psychagogy[9]/edification. This study will investigate the (de)merits of such hypotheses and methodological manoeuvres.

Esack and the Colloquium on ILT

[8]ILT – Islamic Liberation Theology as represented in his book Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression. Farid Esack (1997)

[9]Psychagogy: psuchagôgê, from Greek, psûchê, soul, and agogê, transport to or lead out of; the science of helping to bring out (give birth to) new elements (ideas, beings) from a person's soul or to bring into (transmit to) a person's soul, elements from a higher level of being

Dabashi, a prolific and pugnacious writer, prefers to replace the notion of theology with theodicy and develops his position from the historical phenomenology of a heterogeneous global political culture in which Islam, as a discourse, is integral but not definitive (2008; 235). Three notes to keep in mind about Dabashi are 1) Dabashi wrote 11 years after Esack, during which period the decolonial/transmodern project and formal language gained increasing purchase, 2) Dabashi's thinking resonates clearly with the transmodern project and 3) Scripture, for Dabashi, is a discursive moment in the globalectic not an essential premise.

Esack proceeds from the 'vantage point of the disempowered', and allocates large swathes of his book to pondering text and its applicability to political context. Esack's intellectual engagement with the Quran is particularly ardent about questions of how Muslim self and other is defined in a heterogeneous marginalised community struggling for justice. Dabashi (2008; 132), who seems to question the centrality of the text, dismisses such exercises as futile, calling instead for a cosmopolitan dialogue of the margins (2008; 140).

> Islam that is thus not situated in the real world has not an iota of credibility with a decent vision of humanity at large, let alone a claim to the visions of a prophet whose very first messages of hope was for the homeless and the illegal immigrants of Mecca and Medina of his time.

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Esack repeatedly reminds us that his ILT functions for and in the interests of the margins. This would seem to be the appropriate slogan and commendable position to take. However, from a S/R analytic point of view, the significance of such a claim would have to be inferred from the dialectic between the ideological intertextures and social activism he personified and that described and responded to the milieu he traversed

The relation between Soroush and Esack offers further useful methodological insights. For both, hermeneutics is pivotal to their intellectual and activist undertakings (Esack; 1997) (Soroush; 1998). Esack (1997; 78) uses an approach which appears to rely inordinately on

rhetorical argumentation (1997; 82 - 86), unqualified relativism (Esack; 1997; 75) and first order binaries such as 'positivist - pluralist', 'conservative – progressive'; 'absolutist – relativist'; etc. This study will problematize binaries such as 'either you are an absolutist or a pluralist' because such insinuations gloss over the possibility that opposition to absolutist thinking is varied[10]. Soroush, almost as a philosophical and methodological counterpoint to Esack, argues for a more systematic approach to epistemological hermeneutics characterised by a continual dialogue between the natural, social and sacred sciences.

> If we accept that science has been successful in the task of manipulation of nature, then how could we possibly interpret this success in rational terms except by admitting that it reflects reality? Is not every step of success with nature indicative of a step in the establishment of the realism of science? Can a totally subjective and instrumental pseudo epistemology (as some of the followers of the Frankfurt school accuse science of harbouring) be so successful in practice? Even an instrument, in order to be effective, has to be appropriate to the medium in which it operates. Science, even if it is nothing but a tool (the instrumental view of science), is, thanks to its successes, not alien from reality and has, in that capacity, a general comparability and compatibility with it. One should not exaggerate criticism of science. The antipositivist attacks on science should not be interpreted as attacks on the rational value and worth of science per se. If there is any controversy here, it is not about science but about discovering the proper relationship between knowledge and justice and forging a desirable connection between them. (Soroush; 1998; 70)

Another contrast that could help us apprehend the distinction between the approaches of Soroush and Esack is the notion of pluralism. Esack is obliged to adopt a pluralist approach to hermeneutics because in his challenge to 'traditionalist'[11] readings of the Quran, and in defence of his own, he has to rebut (1) what he terms their 'positivist/absolutist' approach to history, and (2) 'the fundamentalist assumption that there is not only a singular truth, but also a singular understanding of it' (1997; 78).

[10] Adherents of radical constructivism (Von Glasersfeld; 1995), pragmatism (Rescher; 2005) anti-foundationalism (Rorty; 1989; 1991), post-foundationalism (Butler; 1992), and critical realism (Bhaskar; 1998) thought also take exception to all forms of absolutism. Often these different positions have incommensurable political and epistemological implications and solutions and cannot be plausibly bundled into a simple binary.

[11] Esack's usage of the term 'traditionalists' is often bemusing. It is unclear whether he is referring to the conservative local theocracy, the grand intellectual legacy of Islam, or a very particular aspect of this complex historical presence/hauntology. In this instance, and several other, the text suggests Esack is referring to the local, generally apathetic and sectarian, theocracy.

However, pluralism has its own connotative freight. Thus Esack also has to avoid the pitfalls of a pluralism when it 'simply becomes 'a passive response to more and more possibilities, none of which shall ever be practised' (Tracy in Esack 1997; 78). To resolve this dilemma, Esack suggests we ask the question, 'for whom and in whose interests', and answers 'I argue for the freedom to rethink the meanings and use of scripture … and to forge hermeneutical keys that will enable us to read the text …to advance the liberation of all people.' (1997; 78). The question arises, how do we curb our partisan predilections and ensure that our 'freedom' to construct and contrive questions/answers are aligned to the objective existential needs and aspirations of 'all people'? It is easier to proclaim one's 'noble intentions', for whatever stratagem, then it is to develop and embody a methodology and pedagogy to actualise them. Robbins (2005; 120) thus exhorts 'The interpreter … to engage in heteronomous responsibility rather than autonomous freedom, in intersubjective exploration rather than egological imposition?'

It is pertinent to note that, particularly in view of the history of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism in Africa, expressions such as 'freedom to rethink' and 'liberation for all' are generally polysemic and were highly contested during the period in which Esack's text was produced. Part of this study will, therefore, attempt to assess the reflective equilibrium[12] - ethical consistency and intellectual coherence - of Esack's theopolitical deliberations. In so doing, the study will also be watchful of the tendency to conflate the epistemological and political (Esack 1997; 78) for rhetorical effect. The allied question, does theoretical coherence have to be compromised to advance plausible political and social campaigns. This question

[12] "The method of reflective equilibrium consists in working back and forth among our considered judgments (some say our "intuitions") about particular instances or cases, the principles or rules that we believe govern them, and the theoretical considerations that we believe bear on accepting these considered judgments, principles, or rules revising any of these elements whenever necessary in order to achieve an acceptable coherence among them." "The method of reflective equilibrium has been advocated as a coherence account of justification (as contrasted with an account of truth) in several areas of inquiry, including inductive and deductive logic as well as ethics and political philosophy." Daniels, Norman, "Reflective Equilibrium", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition)

will also be considered in this study. Soroush, seemingly as a foil to Esack again, urges careful analysis and cautions against glib labelling. Hasshas (2014; 144) reports:

> Soroush's epistemological position rests on "reasoned pluralism," and "hermeneutic pluralism," for they affect religious understanding, and lead to "epistemological pluralism." Reasoned pluralism (positive pluralism) embraces plurality to which everyone is invited to participate, according to their truth. This engenders "rational modesty." This means that no one considers his beliefs as the chosen ones, or the only true ones any longer. Monopoly of God and truth is over; pluralism, which is the norm of the world prevails. Politically, no society then has to be governed by one ideological/ pragmatic/ instrumental interpretation; a "pluralistic society" is free and open as nature, unlike the "ideological society" that narrows down the premises of the truth(s) and ideologies it embraces.

Engineer (1939 - 2013), an exceptionally prolific writer and dedicated non-sectarian activist, is regarded as the progenitor of the descriptor Islamic liberation theology in the modern era. His work can be seen as pioneering in developing its early rudimentary archive[13]. Unlike the others, he doesn't attempt any major theoretical de/reconstructions. Instead, he argues that Muslims should 'work for their own political and social liberation through modern education, on one hand, and, ushering in democratic culture, on the other.' (2-3; 2002). While this paper acknowledges Engineer's pioneering theopolitical efforts, his archival legacy will only be tangentially engaged, if at all.

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Reception of QLP

In his QLP, Esack's theopolitical vision embraces a hermeneutic which strives to promote a non-sectarian emancipatory reading of the Quran (Esack, 1997). Reception of QLP has been ambivalent, either sanguine or circumspect. Most reviewers and citations focus primarily on Esack's hermeneutic, alluding obliquely, if at all, to his religio-political liberalism.

[13] Islam and Muslims: A critical Assessment (1985); Indian Muslims: A study of the Minority Problem in India (1985); Communalism and Communal Violence in India: An Analytical Approach to Hindu-Muslim conflict (1989).

The sanguine response is embodied in the comments and citations of Kurzman (1998), Van de Heever (2014), and Pebril (2002) who applaud the liberal pluralist hermeneutic QLP proposes through the unqualified assertion that 'people and context' make truth and meaning. None of these authors engage Esack's conceptual or theoretical architectonic. They simply affirm and identify with the agreeable assertions. They show no interest in the logical structure and epistemic substance of his claims and arguments.

The following authors express the more circumspect reception. They acknowledge some merit in a reader-oriented analytic, but demur to the inclination, such as Esack's, of indiscriminate hedonistic relativism.

Wittingham (2007) and Vishanoff (2011) raise several concerns about Esack's reader oriented historicist approach. One, it is debatable whether the historical conditioning of a sacred text entirely defines the limits of its potential to enable people to, 'find the absolute'. Echoing a prominent tendency within contemporary hermeneutics (Ricoeur, Gadamer, Derrida, Kearney), Whittingham asserts that 'Language could also, for example, be regarded as yielding knowledge of the transcendent which, while not complete, is nonetheless sufficient to bear the weight of the claims made by a theistic understanding' (Whittingham, 2007, 8). Second, Esack's modernist intellectual fetters and basic incoherence renders him unable to demonstrate how his pluralist notion of hermeneutics fits into an explicit and coherent theory of revelation?

Another, theosophically more engaged, response is encapsulated by Murad (1997). In addition to reservations about Esack's 'hedonistic relativism', he remonstrates against Esack's offhanded reductionist attitude towards the Islamic theosophical legacy. This attitude, he argues, misrepresents the subtleties and multiplicities of the Islamic intellectual heritage. For

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Murad, Esack is found bungling unceremoniously over its many variations and sophisticated positions and often, thereby, reproducing many pejorative liberal and orientalists' stereotypes of Islam. Related to Murad's concerns, Dahlen –Taylor (2012), through a more sedulous treatment of the Quran, demonstrates, for instance, that Esack's Exodus paradigm is a gross and misleading oversimplification of the related themes pertaining to Moses and the errant and variable *mustadafun.*

This study, critically engages QLP at two levels absent in the other approaches. One, the conceptual and theoretical coherence and epistemic substance of Esack's hermeneutics. Two, Esack's theopolitical vision, comprising a rhetoric and a calculus. The theopolitical vision is investigated through the reflective equilibrium between rhetoric and praxis from a subaltern perspective. This refers to the 1) principles and structural modalities of transformational actualisation and knowledge production and 2) the actual composition of Esack's political discourse. The context for the examination of Esack's theopolitical vision is the South African anti-apartheid struggle.

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Methodology

The overarching methodological approach of this research is socio-rhetorical analysis. SR as articulated by Vernon Robbins in his work, 'Exploring the Texture of Texts' (1996). Robbins explains that, "it's goal involves all the language strategies people use to negotiate meanings, but it also includes an awareness of how social and historical locations as well as personal interests affect the interpretive process." Socio-rhetorical analysis serves as a helpful means for classifying material and encourages a vigilant reading of the historical, ideological and socio-cultural intertextual dialectic. It offers, for instance, a 'rhetorolect/belief system/form of life conceived as a form of language variety or discourse (abbreviation of "rhetorical dialect")

identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations' (Robbins, 1996; 356).

This dissertation will encapsulate and engage Esack's unfolding theopolitical vision (rhetorolect) as expounded in his book Quran, Liberation and Pluralism (QLP, 1997). It will focus and rely mainly on his central theses as expressed therein. Consistent with the broad principles of socio-rhetorical analysis it will also incorporate the relevant intertextures where deemed necessary and appropriate.

To help highlight the dynamics of power, critical discourse analysis will also be used. Critical discourse analysis studies the relations between language, power, dominance, social inequality and the dialectic of agency and structure in such relationships (Van Dijk, 1977). Although there are many directions in the study and critique of social inequality, critical discourse analysis approaches these questions and dimensions by focusing on the role of discourse in the (re)production of and challenge to dominance. More specifically, critical discourse analysts want to know what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction. In this study the metaphors of verticality and horizontality, and cognate concepts, are deployed to deconstruct conventional resistance discourse.

The two analytical tools of critical discourse analysis and socio-rhetorical analysis will to some extent be supplemented by decoloniality theory as described earlier. Decoloniality is concerned with confronting, challenging, and undoing the dominative and assimilative force of colonialism as a historical and contemporary process, and the cultural and epistemological Eurocentrism that underwrites it (De Lissovoy, 2010).

It should be kept in mind that while this thesis undertakes a rigorous critique of Esack's theopolitical vision, certain considerations are required to temper and nuance the often unduly

harsh and unavoidable linguistic edges critical engagement engenders. For instance, when a lacuna is recognised in the thinking of an author, this maybe, for analytical purposes, a consequence of at least two conditions. The subject author's idiosyncratic *parole*[14] (at a point in time) and/or the delimiting *langue* of the archive she works within. The critique operates at three levels. There is the paradigmatic, cultural encyclopaedia or discursive environment that characterise the period within which the subject of critique is enculturated and makes her choices. There is the particular individual's subjective refraction of the dominant and contending paradigms. And, there is the idiosyncratic level, where the personal style and individual reasoning of the subject of critique is manifest. The critique often focuses on the *aporia* and incoherence of the interwoven intertextual arguments of Esack without, given the nature of the text, an explicit demarcation of the levels.

For instance, when interrogating his hermeneutics and hermeneutical keys, the critique addresses simultaneously the levels of presentation as follows: the basic logical and semantic formulation of arguments, the implicit and explicit conceptual matrix upon which he relies (relativism, constructivism), and the anomalies insinuated by the larger paradigm within which he is located (rigid binaries; imported, often not organically unfolded[15], liberationist and feminist narratives). The larger paradigm in this case refers to Esack's predominantly Euromodernist orientation, which notwithstanding few innocuous reservations, shapes his arguments.

Overview of the Dissertation

[14] Langue encompasses the abstract, systematic rules and conventions of a signifying system; while Parole refers to the concrete and individual instances of the use of langue.

[15] Esack too often simplistically defines progressive politics as that which acknowledges the oppressive link between race, gender, homophobia, arms, and environment. (1997: 240, 248). His arguments do not engage the more substantive radical and liberal positions on political economy, the state, and the processes of transition.

In chapter one, I will try to recuperate and periodise Esack's biographical trajectory through the notions of image-schemata (IS) and a socio-rhetoric archaeology (SRA). The IS, early experiential pre-conceptual phase, will try to identify salient cultural and existential themes that correlate with the continuities and ruptures of the later archaeological intertextual environment whence he *bricoleured*[16] his theopolitical vision as codified in his QLP. The study acknowledges three explicit, always composite and nuanced, themes, initially separated by the individual, which later become interwoven in the mature subjectivity of Esack and expressed and embodied through his theopolitical vision.

Having outlined the setting and context in which Esack's work unfolded I then move in chapter two to show how his IS and SRA phases implicitly correlate to certain performative aspects of his experiences described in the first chapter to his general discourse. The two phases of his socialization, at times logically and also paradoxically, offer probable antecedent for his bio-political shifts and choices. It will identify, interrogate and evaluate the concepts and arguments that define his hermeneutics. Given Esack's adamant position on situation-based reader-oriented readings, it will interrogate his notions of, amongst others, subjectivity, relativism, history, text and context. It will relate Esack's surface rhetoric and underlying postulates to his apprehension of and response to the historical and discursive dynamics of SA in 1980s – 1990s. This part of the investigation will emphasize architectonic coherence, conceptual functionality and basic semantic and logical consistency.

Chapter three maps and engages the translation of Esack's theory of Quranic hermeneutics (previous chapter) to the socio-rhetoric reality of the anti-apartheid struggle. Esack's mapping

[16] "If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*." (Derrida; 1978; 360)

is supposed to be effected through three pairs of 'keys' – Taqwa/Tauhid, 'theological glasses' serving as moral doctrinal criteria; the People/the Marginalized, the location of interpretative activity; and Justice/Struggle the method and ethos. Together they are expected to help shape 'a contextual understanding of the word of God in an unjust society' (Esack, 1997: 86-7). This chapter acknowledges the contribution some aspects of Esack's argument in this section can make to the evolving liberatory decolonial subaltern archive. It also uncovers some critical lacuna in Esack's rhetoric. First, the unthinking utilization of 'anthropomorphic reification' (also as a form of a priorism[17]) which refers to his problematic arguments in which a complex existential and cognitive condition (cf. Foucault's *askesis*[18] and technologies of self[19]) is posited as a necessary linear mono-causal consequent of a mere proclamation (e.g. Taqwa is a stated principle therefore we embody taqwa in all its splendour). Second, his persistent deployment of floating signifiers – people, justice, freedom, etc. – in a manner which tamely capitulated to the authoritarian populism of ANC's neoliberal project. Third his indifference towards the alternative modes of struggle and knowledge production within the subaltern culture.

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Chapter four builds upon the hermeneutical postulates and keys investigated in the previous two. It follows Esack's diligent archaeology and rearticulation of key signifiers within the

[17] An a priori proposition is one which can be known to be true without any justification from the character of the subject's experience. This does not involve the character of the thinker's experience. Being a priori is to be sharply distinguished from being necessary, from being true purely in virtue of meaning, and from being knowable infallibly. (Boghossian and Peacocke, 2000: 1-9)

[18] "What the Greeks called "*askesis*"… does not mean "ascetic", but has a very broad sense denoting any kind of practical training or exercise. For example, it was a commonplace to say that any kind of art or technique had to be learned by *mathesis and askesis* – by theoretical knowledge and practical training. (Foucault, Techniques of *Parrhesia*, 1999)

[19] technologies of the self, permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. [This] implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes. (Foucault, 1988)

Quranic theopolitical discourse – Islam, *iman*, *din*, and *kufr*. Esack's arguments in favour of a non-reified inclusivist Islam are regarded as cogent and laudable. His methodology in dealing with the rich multifarious intertextual legacy of Islam is problematic. Two consequences can be noted. One, instead of engaging with, he nonchalantly neglects the veritable Islamic theosophical legacy as a cascading independent auxilliary source for the development of a subaltern decolonial archive. Two, his political rhetoric and calculus increasingly displays a susceptibility to political vacillation.

While chapter four laid the theoretical ground work chapter five accepts Esack's archaeology and rearticulation of pivotal Quranic signifiers as providing a meaningful, albeit problematic, theoretical foundation for interreligious solidarity and mobilization against injustice. Its focus is more on praxis and particularly 1) Esack's theopolitical vision comprising a political rhetoric and calculus, and 2) developing the metaphorical and some practical aspects of subaltern prefigurative praxis. Esack's rhetoric is a pastiche of liberal and radical slogans presented as a basket of floating signifiers. The chapter argues that Esack's political calculus is objectified in 1) his inclination towards verticalist political organization and metaphor, 2) a practico-inert rationale and 3) an enchantment with the politics of the spectacle. Together this praxis lent itself to a populism which frustrated the aspirations of the disenfranchised masses.

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Chapter 1

Locating Esack– Biography as Cultural Prism and Social Allegory

Introduction

At the outset of his book, QLP, Esack declares 'Given that every literary production is inescapably autobiographical, I shall locate the birth of my ideas in my personal, social and ideological history' (1997; 1). In complementary vein Robbins observes: 'every self is a storied self. And every story is mingled with the stories of other selves, so that every one of us is entangled in the stories we tell, and are told about us' (Robbins; 2005; 121).

This chapter undertakes to delineate, and interweave the historical, cultural and ideological intertextures in dialogue with which Esack evolved the theopolitical vision espoused in his Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism (QLP, 1997). Intertexture according to Robbins, 'reaches out into language through the verbal signs in the text, and it reaches into information in the world through the narrator, the characters and the represented world in the text' (1996, 32) and 'The goal of socio-rhetorical criticism is to approach people as interactive subjects-objects' (1996, 28).

Discourse theorists such as Jorgensen (2002) and Fairclough (1992) amongst others; 'maintain that individual construction of identity is in constant interdependence with general social and ideological processes and their representation and reconstruction in public voices and discourses' (De Fina, 2006, 13-14).

Expressed otherwise, the subject is not a centralizing master but rather a disciple or auditor of a language larger than itself. Language provides the sites for intersection of texts that constitute subjectivity. As Hall explains, subjectivities/identities 'are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (Hall,

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1996: 394). I would add the present too. There is also an inevitable component of individuality. However, biography/individuality, if not clearly demarcated, is an intractable subject[20]. As the heading insinuates the approach adopted here is not merely idiosyncratic and will draw upon a diverse interrelated conceptual repertoire.

In characterising Esack's biographical journey two particular concepts are used. The first, Image-Schemata, and the second Socio-Rhetoric Archaeology. We apply the former to his early years and the latter to his intellectually more mature period.

Image-Schemata (IS) according to Johnson (1992, xiv - xvi) refers to…

> …experiential structures of meaning that are essential to most of our abstract understanding and reasoning … gestalt structures, consisting of parts standing in relations and organized into unified wholes, by means of which our experience manifests discernible order. It involves many preconceptual and non-propositional structures of experience that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings. "Experience," understood in a very rich, broad sense as including basic perceptual, motor-program, emotional, historical, social, and linguistic dimensions. I am rejecting the classical empiricist notion of experience as reducible to passively received sense impressions, which are combined to form atomic experiences.

Socio-Rhetoric Archaeology (SRA) as used in this dissertation will follow Mills (2003; 24-25) who views it as –

> (Archaeology) that which can be regarded as the delineation of the system of unwritten rules which produces, organises and distributes the 'statement' as it occurs in an archive (that is, an 'organised body' of statements which could be likened to a paradigm/discourse). Foucault describes the archive as 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'. Kendall and Wickham describe archaeology in the following terms: 'Archaeology helps us to explore the networks of what is said, and what can be seen in a set of social arrangements.' Several proponents and critics of the Foucauldian approach , such as Mills, also maintain that archaeological analysis is not interpretative; that is, 'it does not offer explanations of what happened in the past – it simply describes what happens and the discursive conditions under which it was possible for that to happen.

Early years

Esack was born in the dappled suburb of Wynberg, a popular part of the mother city of South

[20] Distinguished biography bears no resemblance to the voluminous, indiscriminate compendia of facts-shovelled-on-facts in which the biographer buries alive both his hero and the reader (Pachter; 1985; 3).

Africa, Cape Town, in 1955, during a period of increasing social turmoil and political tribulation. His formative years, circa 1950 - 1970, coincided with the juncture of major developments in statecraft (Apartheid), pernicious social engineering initiatives, the historical processes of modernization and industrialization and the attendant social stratification and tensions this occasions. During this period, the ascendency and consolidation of racial capitalism, a torrent of racial laws was promulgated that haunted and tormented virtually every aspect of 'black' life. Posel (2011; 347) expresses it thus:

> If the milieu of fear and suspicion gave some popular credence to a forceful state, the everyday routines of apartheid social engineering necessitated it. The sheer volume – indeed the ubiquity – of legal regulation fostered apartheid's endemic violence. For an African[21] person, all the minutiae of everyday life – where and with whom they lived, worked, had sex, travelled, shopped, walked or sat down, what they owned and consumed – were governed either by the issue of appropriate permits or passes or by public prohibitions and proscriptions. So encounters with police, charged with enforcing the racial boundaries that animated these regimes of surveillance, were inevitable, and breaches of the myriad regulations were legion.

It is worth noting, as several commentators remind us, that the National Party's (the ruling White Party that instituted Apartheid on coming to power in 1948) policies did not represent a new socio-political narrative. Nattrass (2005, 49) states that 'inequality predated apartheid, and the core components of its distributional regime predated the system itself'. Marais (2011, 8) declares that 'The origins of South Africa's systematic polarisation lie in the late nineteenth century, when the development of capitalism accelerated rapidly with the onset of diamond mining in 1867 and gold mining in 1886.' Cell (1982) concludes, 'the principal architect of segregation was not General Hertzog. It was General Smuts.' This observation, Saul believes, underscores just how much was shared of the racial-capitalist agenda so vigorously implemented by white politicians in the inter-war period. 'In many ways, Hertzog was merely

[21] The term African is problematic. The term was rejected by anti-apartheid activists because, at the time, it affirmed the official racist categorization. The resistance narratives preferred the term disenfranchised or Black as an inclusivist popular democratic identity marker

to deepen the pattern, even if his programme had an even more overtly racist edge (as witnessed in the passage of the notorious Immorality Act of 1927 that outlawed inter-racial marital and sexual relations, for example)' (Saul, 2014, 39). Hence, while the levels of oppression and dispossession were intensified under apartheid, the socio-economic and ideological path pursued was established over the preceding half-century.

Moreover, a wide spectrum of historiographers (Nattrass (2005), Thompson (2001), Marais (2011), Beinhart (2000)) concur that interventions to bolster and expand the white racist regime were inseparable from efforts to sustain and regulate practices of capital accumulation and economic growth.

The environment which shaped the image-schemata of the young Esack comprised a dynamic constellation of factors. It was a heterogeneous working class community on the brink of dislocation by the Group Areas Act[22]. In South African parlance this heterogeneity referred to a multi-religious, 'multi-racial', multi-cultural and often also multi class communities. Although the 'enigma of racial division' already pervaded the neighbourhood psyche, the spectral scourge of institutionalised racism had only just begun to metastasize.

Life on the margins brimmed with themes and sensibilities of solidarity, generosity, care, and reciprocity[23], but not blatantly or in a 'formalised' manner. They were, instead, mainly encoded

[22] This Act enforced the segregation of the different races to specific areas within the urban locale. It also restricted ownership and the occupation of land to a specific statutory group. This meant that Blacks could not own or occupy land in White areas. While the law was supposed to apply in converse, it was essentially land under Black ownership that was appropriated by the Government for use by Whites only.

[23] From the period circa 1980 in South Africa, anti-apartheid activists and academics began to extend and refine their theoretical horizons. As Cohen (1980) expresses it 'A major weakness in the interpretations proffered by many radical commentators on African labour protest and worker consciousness has resulted from their efforts to define the characteristics of the African proletariat by the use of traditional 'formula dichotomies.' The methodological limitations imposed by these formulas … (produce) an imbalance caused by analysing overt worker militancy without paying adequate attention to the covert type… (resulting) in an overall false conception of labour consciousness.' Researchers who have focused on anti-apartheid resistance and who have contributed to this view include, amongst others, Allen (1992), Bozzoli, Copland, Koch (1981), Cohen (1980, 1991), Gordon

into the music, mischief, mirth, femininity, masculinity, memory and magnanimity of working class cultural resilience; albeit never free or far from the intermittent sobering intrusions of their antitheses[24]. People shared the little they earned and offered each other candid criticism and consolation depending on the demands of the moment. But the conditions also engendered a harshness and an unembellished pragmatic instinctiveness. Like so many on the edge of society, Esack thrived on the spirit of communalism and the scintillating, at times scathing, wit and repartee of the culture. Despite the undeniable charm of the 'rituals of resistance' fashioned on the margins, it would be absurd to romanticise the life of the downtrodden. There are always lesions too!

Rabkin in his study of Drum[25] magazine and the social ethos that inspired its content, muses that it was a 'synthesis of the squalid and the tinselled, the sordid and the heroic, the destructive and the creative, which constitutes the peculiar character of township life' (1975; 27). Esack recalls, 'My father abandoned our family when I was three weeks old….My mother was an underpaid worker in a factory…On our Christian neighbours we depended for 'a cup of sugar', 'a rand till Friday', and a shoulder to cry on' (1997; 1-3).

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Amidst these seething cultural and psychological currents we shadow the young Esack and try to identify the formative themes which would help to unravel the calculus, emotion and ethics

(1977), James (1990), Kotze (1988), Lodge (1989), van Onselen (1976, 1982), Ross, Mager, Nasson (2011), von Holdt (1988), Webster (1988). More generally, internationally, a number of authors have carried out detailed ethnographic studies of the formation of meaning in everyday life, and have confirmed that such meaning-formation has little relationship to elite or state political forms. James Scott, for instance, has revealed the existence of a distinct 'little tradition' among the peasantry, constructed through everyday communication, primarily in the medium of 'hidden transcripts' which are concealed from political and intellectual 'leaders' in the wider society (Scott 1977a, 1977b, 1990)

[24] Academics who adopt a semiotic approach are not alone in reading significance into the loaded surfaces of life. The existence of spectacular subcultures continually opens up those surfaces to other potentially subversive readings. (Hebdige, 1979, 18). Cultural styles (constitute) symbolic forms of resistance; as spectacular symptoms of a wider and more generally submerged dissent. (Hebdige, 1979, 80)

[25] The decade 1950-1960 was a critical period in the development of South African literature. Drum magazine provided a record of those times, as well as a platform for its writers.(Rabkin; 1975; 4)

that would shape/inspire his theopolitical odyssey and eventually culminate in QLP (Esack, 1997, 3)

> The fact that our oppression was made bearable by the solidarity, humanity and laughter of our Christian neighbours made me suspicious of all religious ideas that claimed salvation only for their own and imbued me with a deep awareness of the intrinsic worth of the religious other.

Esack's IS phase ranges from birth to about the age of thirteen, 1968, when his mother passed on. In the same year he completed his primary school education. Esack was a perceptive, enthusiastic and astute child. However, his exuberance was not always appreciated. Some teachers found his enthusiasm intrusive and conceited as when he corrected a teacher who mistakenly defined the word mosaic as a practice associated with the biblical Moses. He promptly and 'impudently' pointed out the error. Other teachers, however, considered him to be precocious and entertaining, indulging his oratory histrionics or reading skills to impress and amuse their colleagues.

History

Esack's IS phase (1955 - 1968) overlaps with two wider historical phases. One, circa 1950-1960, marking the inception of Apartheid, the resurgence of Popular Resistance, and the effective intensification of Repression. And, two, circa. 1960 to the early 1970's a period characterized by protracted quiescence eventually culminating in the birth of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The first period 1950-1960, was remarkable for several landmarks in the struggle against apartheid. These include the following. The Defiance Campaign of 1952, an initiative highlighted by the deliberate breaking of 'unjust laws' and the conscious courting of arrest. The campaign was uneven in its geographical spread, but, nonetheless, regarded by activists and historians as one of 'the real high water marks of resistance in the 1950s'. (Saul; 2014; 53).

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In 1955, as part of a widely felt need for greater cohesion, the Congress Alliance was formed, the historical Freedom Charter was composed and adopted and the ANC-aligned South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) launched. Although the Charter was reticent and/or ambiguous on the position of women and alternative economic systems, many agree that it 'reflected a compromise between the various currents.' (Saul; 2014; 55). Marais proposes that 'The Charter and its drafting process would, in decades to follow, become intensely mythologised … and put to powerful use in the ANC's efforts to establish its hegemony among the anti-apartheid opposition.' (Marais; 23; 2011)

'The 1950s', according to Lodge (1989; 139), 'was a period of unprecedented activity by African women in political organisations as well as in more spontaneous forms of protest.' In an expression which epitomised the era, on 9 August 1956, 20,000 women under the banner of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against passes for women. This day will be later celebrated as National Women's Day in South Africa.

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As the decade drew to a close, tensions between the ANC mainstream and its Africanist elements, who were growing increasingly impatient with liberal influences in the Congress alliance, resulted in a schism when a breakaway group led by Robert Sobukwe and others formed the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in April 1959.[26]

On March 21, 1960, the PAC launched a campaign against the pass laws. Large numbers of the disenfranchised assembled at police stations without passes, inviting arrest in the hope of clogging the machinery of the system. At the police station in Sharpeville, near Johannesburg,

[26] The PAC, with a seemingly more militant stance, organised the anti-pass-law campaign during which police shot dead 69 protestors in Sharpeville and 17 in Langa, outside Cape Town.

the police opened fire, killing 69 and wounding 186, most of whom were shot in the back. In the following weeks there were widespread work stoppages, and disturbances in various parts of the country. In Cape Town, on March 30, a crowd estimated at between 15,000 and 30,000, marched in orderly procession to the centre of the city, near Parliament, which was in session. The police assured their leader, a twenty-three-year-old university student named Philip Kgosana that the Minister of Justice would receive him that evening if he would persuade the people to return home. He told them to go, and they did so. That evening, when Kgosana reported, the police arrested him.

The 1950s, remarked Saul (2014; 53) 'were to become, in the much leaner years ahead, an important reference point for many who sought to revive resistance. Moreover, the historical memory of the campaigns of the decade would also help to consolidate the reputation of the ANC as a political actor of unique legitimacy.'

Sharpeville (together with other historical junctures) can be described as a 'saturated phenomenon', where the 'saturated phenomenon' describes the 'excess of intuition over signification'.

Sharpeville would dramatically transform the collective unconscious of practical life. The communal iconography, the affective and cognitive cultural matrix, the repertoire of coping strategies and the mythological and psychological imagination of the oppressed people would be permanently reconfigured. Ricoeur (2004) proposes a theorisation that relates to the saturated phenomenon as follows. The future emerges from our ability to articulate a narrative identity out of historical and fictive resources. We rework language to rediscover what/who we are, since what is lost in experience can be salvaged through a return to the multi-layered

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sedimentations of language and psyche.

Joe Tlholoe, a prominent and prolific South African journalist, who was a high school pupil at the time, wrote years later: "With hindsight, the story is simple. That is the story that historians will relate. The real story was a more complex mixture of pain and grief, suffering, anger and courage that is best left to *izimbongi*, the African epic poets, to tell." Mager and Malaudzi (2011; 396) describe Sharpeville as a watershed. The events that followed the shootings irrevocably changed the character of resistance against the system. On 8 April 1960, the ANC, PAC and CPC were banned. A state of emergency was declared and hundreds of people were detained and held without trial. The ANC and the PAC went underground, shifting strategy from civil disobedience to armed struggle.

The significance of the Sharpeville crisis (1960), according to Lodge (1989; 225), was not a squandered opportunity for revolutionary action. Instead it represented a turning point in the history of African nationalism, when protest finally hardened into resistance, and when activists were forced to begin thinking in terms of a revolutionary strategy. The international community's first reaction to the Sharpeville massacre was one of panic and dismay. Capital began flowing out of the country. Yet, as soon as brute force proved capable of defending ruling interests, Saul and Bond (2014; 56-59) argue, international economic actors rallied to bail out the momentarily faltering economy in whose potential they had invested so substantially. With the alliance between racialism and capitalism restored (Minter; 1986; 190), 'the ruling class created the conditions for nearly a decade of uninterrupted boom from 1963 to 1972' (Davies et al; 1988; 28).

The 1960s was a period of great growth and diversification for conglomerates such as Anglo

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America. It was also a period in which the lines between so-called 'English' capital on the one hand and 'Afrikaner' capital on the other began to fade. Davies et al (1988; 28) describe the 1960s as…

> …the golden age of apartheid for those class forces that benefitted from the system. It saw real growth rates of from 6 percent to 8 percent per annum. Based on the maintenance of a consistently high level of repression which kept the wage levels of black workers at a constant low level, the period also saw record profit rates well above the world average.

For black people (the unfranchised), the 1960s was a decade which 'ushered in a period of relative acquiescence, born of a combination of exhaustion and fear'. Lodge (1989; 321-322) has suggested in offering 'a tentative explanation of the relative tranquillity of the 1960s' the 'most obvious cause' of the overall set-back that popular resistance now experienced was 'the suppression of the nationalist movements and the imprisonment, banning or exile of an entire generation of politicians and trade unionists' on the one hand and the 'unlimited powers of arrest and detention as well as the increasingly lavish budgets' granted to the police on the other. This, plus 'an army of informers … fresh restrictions on political discussion,' further controls over population movement and settlement, and 'a limited degree of co-option'! Lewis (1983; 189) described the sixties as the 'survival years,' characterized by 'official repression and comprehensive legal discrimination, employer hostility, weak organization, and by quiescence on the factory floor'.

Despite all this, however, resistance was by no means dead. It is important to note that its resurgence was imminent and not to be ascribed exclusively to the 'mobilizing' efforts undertaken by 'the liberation movements', whose members were either exiled or incarcerated. A new set of actors inside the country were about to announce their disaffection, indignation and audacity. These voices were not indifferent to the liberation movements, but as the product

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of fresh configurations and contradictions within the country, not reducible to them either.

Notwithstanding a veneer of docility and an air of surrender, it would be foolhardy to assume that there were no undercurrents. The architects and beneficiaries of apartheid were vigorously unfolding and implementing their ambitious vision. The specific dynamics of racialized urbanization, industrialization and modernization persevered relentlessly. Escalating decolonial activism and ideological developments on the African continent and amongst the African American peoples[27] seemed to correlate with and foment the emergence of a new generation of activists in South Africa exhibiting untrammelled aspirations and a brazen new social logic. The labour movement adjusted and adapted to the new socio-economic realities and dynamics by extending its strategic and political horizons. These were some of the more salient developments reshaping the socio-political landscape of the time.

According to Beinhart (2000; 191) 'The contours of African life through the relatively quiescent decade after 1963 were moulded by demographic and social change as much as by repression.' Saul (2014; 60) asserts that 'The requirements of a booming, rapidly changing, capitalist system for more skilled labour and a wider consumer market … would eventually cause some problems.' Thompson (2001; 211) commenting on the decade of the 1960s adds 'Quiescence did not mean acquiescence. Three significant developments fuelled a spirit of resistance until it broke out in massive confrontations in 1976.' First, there was a vigorous movement in the arts as encapsulated in Kraai's declaration "Black theatre is a dialogue of confrontation, confrontation with the Black situation." (Brewer; 1986; 305). Second, says Thompson was 'the rapid growth of the economy… the development of class consciousness among black workers and the creation of an effective black trade union movement, despite its exclusion from the

[27] Example Malcolm X, Black Panther, Civil Rights, Martin Luther King

formal bargaining process.' Third, 'the government's attempt to mould the minds of young black people through tight control over their education boomeranged.'

The first inklings of these new trends were probably embodied, in among other facts, the founding of South African Students Organisation (SASO). In 1968 Steve Biko, a twenty-two-year-old student led a secession from the white-controlled National Union of South African Students to found the exclusively black (SASO). SASO declared that all the victims of white racism should unite and cease to depend on white organizations that claimed to work for their benefit. As Biko (1979; 49) wrote in 1971:

> Black consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their subjection-the blackness of their skin-and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the "normal" which is white.... It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life. The interrelationship between the consciousness of self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance. Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish.

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Biography

Esack's first 'direct intellectual encounter' with politics occurred in 1961, while bouncing on a bed innocently waving the flag of the just inaugurated Republic of South Africa (RSA). Aunty Katie, one of the doting neighbourhood matriarchs and a crucial part of the communitarian extended family, admonished him explaining that the majority of people in South Africa found the occasion invidious and the system it celebrated dehumanizing. This conversation, seemingly trivial, would prove to be significant, marking the beginning of a more integrated less parochial view of the world. The second direct intellectual encounter with the political was

after the assassination of, the then Prime Minister of South Africa, Verwoerd, in 1966. Esack's teacher asked her class of learners to comment on the incident. As was his wont, Esack volunteered. He vaguely recalls having said that the death of an individual, regardless of her/his eminence, would not significantly affect the conditions of life of the majority in the country. For the rest of this period, in Esack's life, there are no more 'direct intellectual encounters' with politics.

Throughout this phase, in addition to the many subtle unavoidable intersecting environments, three spheres appear predominant in contouring his affective and cognitive sensibilities – home, religion and school. The home environment was invigorated and formed by two dramatically contrasting matriarchs: mother and grandmother (Esack, 2012, 211).

Grandmother was a dour and abrasive woman prone to frequent violent eruptions often smiting the offender or closest unsuspecting scapegoat with whatever object was within reach. Her weapons could be anything from a ladle or club to a pot. His mother regularly suffered as a victim of these violent outbursts. There were many nights when sleep was practically impossible for the young Esack as he listened in anguish to his mother's sobs. His mother, like many of her working class comrades, was a quietly determined woman and assiduous parent who strove to ensure her children were well behaved, neat, safe and clean. She endured the rigours of super-exploitation and living on the brutal margins of a racist, patriarchal, capitalist society with dignity and fortitude. She was proud of her religious identity and insisted that her children always observe the required social and religious protocol.

School was an arena in which the young Esack thrived. At school his instinctive shrewdness, linguistic flair, and ready repartee were afforded ample opportunity to be expressed and honed. By most accounts, including his own, Esack had a predilection for histrionics which verged

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precariously on and sometimes even slipped into vanity. Fleetingly, each day, in the relatively safe and egalitarian environment of school, the stark barrenness of community life and the harshness and ambivalence of home life under granny or indigence were allowed to recede.

Although his personal repertoire, understandably, included some cynical elements, his youthful innocence, precarious circumstances, intellectual verve and obliging nature endeared him to many of his teachers who often also provided solace and nourishment for the unfolding young personality. Esack reminisces about those early days and the many benevolent gestures he received with a wistful yet thankful glint in his eyes. These personal qualities in collusion with other factors would, as we will show, prove to be crucial on his journey towards achievement and acknowledgment.

Religious trajectory

From a very tender age and continuing to this day, the living traditions, symbols and institutional structures/legacy of Islam would serve, engage, challenge and chasten him in innumerable and telling ways 'In my family, Islam as a cultural anchor was an important tool in the struggle for survival among the sandy dunes and Port Jackson trees of Bonteheuwel' (Esack, 1997, 3).

Esack reports that he was 'strangely religious as a child, with a deep concern for the suffering which I experienced and witnessed around me.' (1997, 4). At the age of seven, his abiding ambition was to become an imam[28]. At nine, when many of his generation in the working class

[28] Esack's other burning desire was to be a leader-orator. He acknowledges that he seemed to revel in the glare of spectacle.

neighbourhoods of Cape Town turned to the fellowship and ambiguous safety of gangs and the solace of drugs, he joined the local chapter of an international Islamic revivalist movement known as the Tablighi Jama'ah. The organisation, a global Sunni Islamic proselytizing and revivalist movement and still active, focuses on urging Muslims to return to the original paradigm of Sunni Islam. Avowedly quietist, their emphases are on matters of ritual, dress, and personal piety.

Esack's dedication was so exhaustive and uncompromising that not even the occasional sporting event or some recreational activity could be accommodated in his schedule. By the age of ten he was the secretary of the mosque committee and a teacher at the local madressah (Islamic school.) At 11 he served as temporary head of another madressah. By the time he turned 15 he had won a scholarship to attend an Islamic religious seminary in Pakistan (we will return to this later in this chapter).

This realm of classical religious education would seemingly and ironically complement the realm of modern secular schooling and allow him to cultivate the emotional resilience and intellectual resources necessary to endure and transcend the hardships and hindrances of a life on the edges of sanity and society. He fondly recalls the idiosyncrasies of his many mentors and the empowering socio-religious customs and rituals from this decisive biographical chapter of his evolution. His most vivid and heart-warming recollections tend to circle around the intellectual adroitness, strict discipline and compassion of his tutors and the structure, clearly defined goals and security of the fellowship.

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History

In October, 1971, 4 000 dockworkers in Durban and Cape Town went on strike for higher wages. The militancy spread and soon workers were striking in other industrial areas including East London and Johannesburg. According to Friedman (1987; 37 - 40):

> The 1970s began for South African employers early on the morning of July 9, 1973, when 2,000 workers at the Coronation Brick and Tile Works on the outskirts of Durban gathered at a football field and demanded a pay rise…For more than a decade, African workers had been seen but rarely heard. Between 1965 and 1971, less than 23,000 African workers had struck. In the first three months of 1973, 61,000 stopped work. By the end of the year, the figure had grown to 90,000 and employers had lost 229,000 shifts–more than seven times the number lost through African strikes in the past eight years.

Many observers refer to 'Durban' as the watershed that marked the revival of resistance in South Africa, suggesting that 'the strike wave that rocked the Durban area in 1972–3 would mark the beginning of the end of the decade of quiescence' (Younis; 2000) (Saul; 2014) (Webster; 2000) (others). This assertion can be endorsed provided it does not disparage or isolate the strikes from parallel popular initiatives in other spheres of society. The student movement, for instance, in their campaigns, although initially sparked by the issue of language and education, consistently articulated their immediate and particular concerns to the wider concerns of the oppressed. While the workers' struggle was central and had a strategic focus, the textural subtleties of the broader liberatory discourse was been elaborated by the dialogical activities of all 'mutineers' including students, Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), cultural activists, women and the labour movement (Marais; 2011; 49-50).

The period, circa 1970s-1980s, was formative for the resistance movement. Popular responses and initiatives, rarely a homogenous bloc of subjects ululating a monotonous hymn, assumed numerous nuanced organized and spontaneous forms, often couched in the conceptual and

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rhetorical terminology of the various ideological and political orientations of the time. Two crucial ideological tendencies described the main contours of the discursive terrain, the liberal and the radical. The liberal view, premised upon the notion that what was good for big business was good for democracy, contended that capital should be a major—if not the primary—player in the struggle for democracy. Radicals, however, saw capital as partner and principal beneficiary of apartheid and thus democratisation required the overthrow of capitalism as well as apartheid. (Nattrass; 22; 2005). As with all discursive phenomena, neat categorization always glosses over significant nuances. (See Nattrass; Saul; Bond; Beinart; Posel; Marais).

These conditions, nonetheless, set the socio-rhetorical scene for the ANC's triumphal hegemonic articulation, and electoral victory that would leave activists and commentators in a dilemma - both elated and in a state of disquiet. (Saul; 2014; 63)(Adelzadeh; 1996) (Marais; 2011; 62).

Biography

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High school, expectedly, presents Esack with new and more diverse challenges, personalities and opportunities. It occasions the inception of his archaeological phase (a conscious assimilation of and interaction with the intellectual and socio-political narratives of the day) which coincides and intertwines with the beginning of his organization centred political activism. The two critical leitmotifs, that hitherto propelled his life, learning and yearning (secular and religion), persevere and intensify albeit as distinct parallel lines. School and religious communion becomes a surrogate home away from home. School accommodated his extroversion and also catered for the needs of his inquisitive and astute mind while religious

fellowship helped to affirm social identity and enhance his mythological schema[29].

The charisma of his fragile exuberance and precocious resolve continued to win the interest and sympathy of teachers and magnanimous adults around him. These encounters ultimately bolster him emotionally and extend and enrich his intellectual and political horizons. It is noteworthy that, despite South Africa being a highly stratified society then, Esack's benefactors were predominantly members of the religious, racial and social other.

A typical illustration, amongst a plethora of others, is found in X - a white, middle-class, atheist teacher - who took a keen supererogatory interest in nurturing his total development. She caringly fosters the burgeoning intellect and political nous of the teenager by giving mental and physical succour. She introduces him to a very new world through the thought-provoking musings and perspectives of radical cosmopolitan thinkers such as Freire, Illich and Goodman.

The early 1970s prove to be a telling turning point in Esack's journey. He purposefully inaugurates his organizational political activism by joining the National Youth Action (NYA), a high school based affiliate of National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), where within a year he progresses rapidly through the ranks. He is elected as regional/provincial co-ordinator and shortly thereafter is nominated and elected as national president. There is an irony in this decision/affiliation that seems to recur at crucial junctures as a distinctive motif in Esack's theopolitical odyssey. For almost two years (a long time) Esack remains loyal to the policies and position of the liberal, widely criticised, NYA despite the dramatic dissemination

[29] I am using the idea of myth here to suggest that 'Myths like art, have a function of reconciling on the imaginary plane those social contradictions which cannot be resolved on the real plane. In other words, myths are therapeutic by nature because they deal with something which societies might otherwise keep repressed….Levi-Strauss…understood the significance of myths as evidence of a society's way of understanding the world around it' (Panneerselvam, 1999, 23).

of Black Consciousness thinking and the rise of the more radical South African Students Movement [SASM] (Lodge; 2011; 416-426).

It is unclear how Esack resolves this tension, although several plausible, if not apocryphal, references to stubborn and protracted debates with friends and fellow activists about the matter do abound. At times Esack implies that he made a switch to the more subaltern and radical SASM tendency. But whether the shift was formal organizational or merely a private retrospective narrative redaction is also unclear. There is no cogent rationale, only an, apparent inexplicable, impulse. Some charitable observers have interpreted this trait as a quality of independence, while a range of others, close associates and detractors, regard it as a mark of political opportunism, a binary this dissertation will attempt to deconstruct as part of the Socio-Rhetoric genealogy of QLP. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the managerial and manoeuvring skills garnered during his NYA tenure would prove 'helpful' to his personal ambition and/or theopolitical vision.

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His life-project, at this point, is now significantly expanded as he consciously adds the third theme of political activism to the other two: intellectual development and religious fortification. However, the three lines remain parallel for a while longer.

This poem encapsulates or refracts some of the nuances and paradoxes that describe the churning crucible of young Esack's life at this juncture around the 1970s.

rebel raindrop

the sun shines on bringing down warmth

its the bluest of all blue skys in all of time and space

brilliant white clouds dot the sky

a single raindrop threatens to fall from a cloud

dares the sun to hold him back

taunts the wind to stop him

but then it's too late

he falls

no one can stop him now

he's a Rebel Raindrop

(Griffel, 2015)

In 1973, he is briefly detained for his involvement in student political activities. Characteristically, the incident is almost nonchalantly reported in his book and interviews. However the solicitude of teacher X, who runs despairingly after the police vehicle to pass sandwiches through the grill to him, and the gestures of solidarity from Rev. Y looms much more poignantly and indelibly in his memory. In 1974, Esack leaves for Pakistan. This commences the phase of higher formal education in Islamic studies. It would be eight years of discipline, ardour, disenchantment, brooding, and evolution punctuated by two significant cusp moments.

The Pakistan into which Esack arrives (1974 – 1982)

Ahmed (1991), Ali (1983), and Malik (2008) provide a description of the intertextual socio-rhetoric milieu of Pakistan in which Esack would pursue his religious studies. They all agree that Pakistan meant different things to different people. To the landlords it meant continued leadership. To the doctrinal-minded Muslims, a unique opportunity to create an Islamic state

in the light of their ideas. To the Muslim intelligentsia and the poorer classes, a state where social and economic justice would prevail and their dignity established, according to Iqbalite teachings. To the peasants, freedom from the yoke of the Hindu money-lender. To the regional leaders, greater autonomy than was expected in a united India dominated by the Congress Party. To the Muslim bourgeoisie, the necessary environment where they could develop their potential, which seemed choked in a united India due to the greater strength of Hindu and Parsee capital based in Bombay and Calcutta. To the bureaucrats and the military, an excellent opportunity to secure quick promotions. To the military establishment it offered a central role in a country where the civilian political process was dependent from the very beginning upon its support and active participation.

Malik (2008; 160) notes that:

> …the history of Pakistan all through the 1970s and ever since revolves around the personalities and ideologies of two men, who are poles apart in every aspect of their lives and legacies. Bhutto, a westernized civilian prime minister, believed and practiced populism, whereas Zia-ul-Haq, a military man, sought his legitimacy from Islam. Both adversaries ruled the country using authoritarian methods and met unnatural deaths, yet their legacies continue to polarize Pakistanis even several decades after their departure.

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Central to Bhutto's political rhetoric was the idea of Islamic Socialism, which at the time seemed to resonate with contemporary Arab thinking. It also carried a tinge of anti-western ideology and an ambivalent form of anti-colonialism. Although Bhutto's flamboyant populism was not pleasing to the military-bureaucratic patricians of Pakistan, they tolerated his demagogy, only too aware that he was the one political leader standing between them and complete chaos (Ali; 1983; 100).

Bhutto's political manifesto pledged many major reforms in, *inter alia*, economics, land,

labour, law, and health services. The administration was continually buffeted by ethnic, religious, class and ideological divisions and conflict because of ineffectual policy implementation, opportunism and vacillating loyalties.

The following comments on Pakistan, from their various perspectives, allow us a glimpse of the many meanings and readings Pakistan, particularly during Esack's sojourn there, elicited. These contrasting, though not mutually exclusive, views could also be interpreted as a subtle, not inconsequential, subtext or framework to Esack's more overt experiences and encounters in Pakistan.

Ali (1983; 101-107) contends that Bhutto's

> …reforms were essentially cosmetic, designed to mask the P P P's[30] inability to deliver all it had promised to its voters. …

Kapur (1991; 103-107) reflects:

> The critical variable is that the Army continuously lost its authority with respect to its political, military and ideological functions. Out of the misfortunes of the Pakistani Army came the opportunity for Bhutto to rise to power. I judge Bhutto to have leftist and rightist characteristics. The weight of the one over the other depended on the circumstances and the imperatives in terms of Bhutto's political and career interests.

Ahmed (1991; 222) argues that since 1977 when General Zia-ul-Haq came to power, 'conservative Saudi influence has grown considerably in Pakistan'.

Malik insists that Zia's Islamisation relentlessly undercut the achievements of civil society.

[30] The Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Since its foundation in 1967, it has been regarded as a major and influential political left-wing force in the country and its party's leadership has been dominated by the members of the Bhutto-Zardari family.

Women's rights and other vital national institutions such as the Constitution, political parties, electoral politics, the judiciary, the media and education all suffered.

Ali (1983) contends that when General Zia says that Pakistan would collapse without Islam:

> …he is utilizing an ideological fig-leaf to cover the naked realities of power. What he really means is that, without the army, Pakistan would not exist as before. Islam is a convenience designed to maintain iron control over every different aspect of political and social life.

Biography

While not unmindful of the larger picture in Pakistan, Esack displays his inclination towards an 'opportune personal pragmatism'. His priorities were unequivocal – learn, qualify, self-empower, return, relate, 'succeed'. The wider socio-political-religious developments in Pakistan was not allowed to impinge upon his main priority. For four years Esack studied at Karachi's renowned Jamiah Binnuriyah. As a consequence of the stultifying atmosphere that pervaded the institute, he left it before completing his degree. He eventually completed his degree at Jamiah Alimiyah al-Islamia, a more forbearing establishment, qualifying in Islamic Law and Theology. His enthralment with the Quran, as sacred scripture, intellectual inspiration and cultural beacon, led to more studies focussing intensively on traditional Qur'anic hermeneutics and related disciplines.

Wryly, he remarks that 'Jamiah Binnuriyah is today regarded as among the leading Muslim fundamentalist institutions for the study of Islam in the world' (2012, 212). When asked about the wider social and political tensions and transitions, in Pakistani society, within which his personal narrative there unfolded, Esack responds thus:

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> My Pakistan experience affected my approach to Islam in several significant ways. First, my own keeping the faith was in large measure due to being touched by the humanity of the religious other. Second, the struggle of so many young Christians to relate their faith to concrete issues of justice and the involvement of the clergy in liberation movements in South Africa, Latin America, the Philippines and elsewhere forced me to re-examine the social relevance of my faith. Third, my involvement with 'the Islamic Movement' … made me realize how one can be totally committed to Islam and yet not have it touch one's inner being. (1999, 4-6).

In so far as Islam was and remains his spiritual and theopolitical home and language, the general religious and intellectual intolerance and apathy of the educational institutions in Pakistan caused Esack intense anguish and turmoil. 'It was here that my rejection of narrow closed notions of religion began to be formed. My formal studies exposed me to dogmatism of the worst kind' (2012, 212). Fortunately, the experience of interpersonal and interfaith dialogue and solidarity was reassuring and therapeutic. The camaraderie formed in these situations – inter-denominational trans-religious network of shared aspirations and values - emboldend and inspired him to deconstruct the narrow insensitivity of religious attitudes in Esack's Pakistani experience and reconceptualise and express his Islam in a manner more consonant with his personal and political aspirations and grasp of the human condition[31].

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At about the same time, quite unexpectedly, Esack also finds resonance with other members of his faith community. This occurs when he is invited to attend a meeting with other purportedly politicised international Muslim students also studying in Pakistan which included the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jami'ah Islam. He accepts after much hesitation and attends with great apprehension. The meeting proves to be serendipitous and he is finally able to resolve a chronic internal quandary and source of much distress. For most of his young adult life Esack struggled to reconcile his religious values with his political aspirations. This encounter, through the camaraderie and exchanges, provided the intellectual and moral rationale for a synthesis. The

[31] Although I was very active in the Tablighi Jama'ah at that stage, I found the very existence of this group (of young Christians called Breakthrough) a source of much strength and encouragement and I shared many wonderful years of reflection with them. The companionship which they offered me did much to enable me to retain my faith as a Muslim. (Esack, 1999, 4)

three themes of his life – intellectual development, spiritual edification and political activism against social injustice – now for the first time formed a formidable and unfamiliar interior synergy. Reflecting on his stay in Pakistan, Esack observes: 'I marvel at how I survived the place; a combination of courage, cunning and the Grace of God I suppose.'

Esack returns to South Africa in 1982 as a qualified teacher of the Islamic faith or *Mawlana*. Almost immediately thereafter, he becomes a leading member of the Muslim Judicial Council in the Western Cape and serves on the National Executive of the Muslim Youth Movement. Although some of the assignments were interesting and afforded him the opportunity to travel throughout the country meeting with many people from all walks of life, his duties in both organizations were largely sedentary. During this period, Esack recalls that 'South Africa was entering the beginning of the last stage of our struggle against apartheid and I could not bear being safely tucked away in a seminary' (1997, 6). To harness this restive or volatile energy, he and some friends decided to form a study group. Their central objective was to fashion a coherent response to a tormented and iniquitous society from within a Quranic paradigm. This initiative would unfold organically, over the next few months, in the vibrant Socio-Rhetoric context defined by the master signifier of the era, the United Democratic Front (UDF), and eventually give birth to the Call Of Islam (1984) and later Quran, Liberation and Pluralism (1997).

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History

In 1983 the United Democratic Front (UDF) is launched in Cape Town. One thousand five hundred delegates representing 565 organisations attend. Of those, 313 were from youth groups, and 82 represented civic associations. The next-largest grouping was student bodies. Then and later, the UDF's following was predominantly youthful. 'The front existed',

Reverend Frank Chikane told those present, 'for the sole purpose of opposing the reform proposals and the Koornhof Bills'[32]. According to Lodge (2011, 437), the UDF was established to oppose the Koornhof Bills, the new Black Local Authorities and the tricameral parliament. To many in the townships, the UDF represented the revival of a long-established 'South African populist tradition'. Observers such as Seekings viewed the UDF's function as symbolic and inspirational, helping 'to shape and reshape the collective identities of followers . . . helping to construct a sense of "we"' (Seekings, 2000, 22). At its peak, the UDF[33] claimed the adherence of about seven hundred affiliates, grouped in ten regional clusters embracing every major concentration of population in the country. Its most vigorous components were derived from civic or community organisations, women's groups and youth bodies. Its efficacy and impetus was obtained from township-based affiliates, most of which had emerged in the aftermath of the 1976-77 uprisings, rather than from sophisticated leadership and coordinated organizational structures. Lodge (2011, 446) affirms

> It was the twenty-year-old Comrade Bongani, and graduates of school boycotts, street battles, and factory dismissals, who were to supply the UDF with much of its vitality. As well as utopian socialism, these activists brought in to the movement a generational consciousness, an antiauthoritarian iconoclasm and a susceptibility for brutal violence, each feature quite unprecedented in the culture of black South African political organisations.

[32] In 1982, PW Botha, President of the white South African Republic, proposed a "new deal" through a series of bills. (These were also called the "Koornhof Bills"). Botha wanted to form a "tricameral parliament". Apartheid already classified people into categories by race: African (previously labelled "Bantu"), white, Indian, and coloured. This plan called for those people defined as coloured, Indian and white to vote separately for racially segregated "houses" of parliament. These three houses together would make up the national legislature. The "white" parliament would be the most powerful, and would continue to control most of the resources.

[33] Of course, the UDF was not itself the motor-force behind the myriad of local resistances that came to define a proto-revolutionary moment in South Africa in the 1980s; nor was it the sole voice of such increasingly united action. Nonetheless, it did become, to a significant degree, the presumptive *dirigeant* of South Africa's vast 'precariat' in the townships – even if, as Popo Molefe, one time General Secretary of the UDF, put it, the UDF was forever 'trailing behind the masses'. (Saul, 2014, 87). The precariat, an emerging class characterized by chronic insecurity, detached from old norms of labour and the working class. For the first time in history, governments are reducing the rights of many of their own people while further weakening the rights of more traditional denizens, migrants. (Standing, 2014, 1).

Although a response to its own historical conditions, chronotope[34], with its distinctive features, the UDF, like its predecessors, was fraught with ideological and tactical contestation and antagonism. Thompson (2000, 230) remarks that 'The UDF was heterogeneous and included people who were for as well as against sanctions, and socialists as well as capitalists.' The exiled ANC often tried to insinuate or appropriate credit for the heroic spontaneous grassroots resistance of the people while UDF affiliates repeatedly expressed antipathy toward the concept of peremptory elitist leadership. FOSATU unions agreed to ad hoc alliances with the UDF, but refused affiliation, arguing that to do so might compromise the interests of the working class. (Van Kessel, 2000, 22). Other labour organizations dubbed populists or community unions like FCWU and SAAWU regarded affiliation as a logical political decision. These tensions, as Marais (2011) and others argue, would persist even after the 1985 formation of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which sought to reconcile these two currents of trade union activity. 'The Charterist tradition's (tactical) emphasis on national oppression would (eventually) win the day' (Marais, 2011, 49).

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Diverse commentators such as Friedman (1987), Lewis (1986), Marais (2011), Pillay (2008), Saul (2014) - have also underlined the tension between the petty-bourgeois ambitions of many of those who stepped forward to lead the UDF (expectant minions to the ANC who would step into public office with the movement's victory) and its more genuinely 'precarian'[35] activists and 'foot-soldiers' who might well have been persuaded by a different kind of leadership to keep the struggle for a more genuine liberation alive. As state repression mounted and strategic

[34] Chronotope - spatial and temporal indicators amalgamated into one carefully constructed, concrete whole, and this whole can be used to separate distinctive eras/genres.

[35] The word precariat is derived from precarious and proletarian. It denotes an emerging class characterized by chronic insecurity, detached from old norms of labour and the working class. For the first time in history, governments are reducing the rights of many of their own people while further weakening the rights of more traditional denizens, migrants. (Standing, 2014, 1).

options for the UDF dwindled, the character and dynamism of the organization changed. Lodge (2011, 457) reports that 'Classical united front propositions began to replace the egalitarian anti-capitalism that had welled up from local activist discourses in the movement's earlier phase.' While the townships continued to smoulder, the UDF was forced into retreat through brutal repression and insidious statecraft and eventually banned in 1988.

Biography

In 1989, an embattled Esack leaves for Britain after accepting an invitation from the University of Birmingham to serve a term as a visiting lecturer there. But before that, in 1984, buoyed by the exhilaration and resurgence of mass political action, Esack and his circle establish the Call of Islam (COI). The COI, Esack, somewhat extravagantly, rhapsodizes 'this affiliate of the UDF … soon became the most active Muslim movement, mobilizing nationally against apartheid, gender inequality, threats to the environment and interfaith work' (1997, 6).

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The COI and the subsequent composition of QLP represent crystallised distillations of Esack's reflections on and institutional responses to a matrix of questions and concerns spawned by the period, South Africa 1980s – 90s. In an evocative reflection, Esack (1999, 2) proclaims his quest for:

> A radical Islam committed to social justice, to individual liberty and the quest for the Transcendent who is beyond all institutional religious and dogmatic constructions; an Islam that challenges us to examine our faith in personally and socially relevant terms. This Islam, I believe, provides a set of personal responses in an increasingly materialistic society where most people are living, and very many dying, lives of quiet desperation with a frightening sense of alienation from themselves, others and Allah. Muslims can make an effective contribution alongside those of other religious convictions to the creation of a world wherein it is safe to be human. One of the things that often distinguishes religious groups from other ideological groups is our commitment to personal introspection[36]. We struggle not only to examine the socio-economic structures that create and entrench oppression but also to examine our

[36] A somewhat rash presumptuous claim. 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' Socrates

> personal roles in, as well as reactions to, them. We ask questions such as 'How do we relate to our faith in concrete terms?', 'How do we become "witness bearers for Allah" in an unjust society?', 'How do we strengthen ourselves in a common commitment to establish a just order on earth?' and 'How do we commit ourselves to others in an atmosphere of honesty and acceptance?' Our personal responses to these questions are, in the final analysis, the only barometer of our commitment to a holistic Islam.

Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective on Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression, is Esack's most comprehensive anecdotal-academic theopolitical response to the Socio-Rhetoric challenges taunting the Muslim conscience living under racial capitalist South Africa. The book is a response to two basic composite questions. One, how can we read the Qur'an appropriately in an unjust society? Two, what political praxis, in apartheid South Africa, would be most consonant with the needs and aspirations of the subaltern?

It is also fitting, here, to observe that Esack's 'activism', particularly in his mature post 1997 oral reminiscences and texts, is largely anecdotal and characterised overwhelmingly by organizational affiliation, policy statements, public posturing and platforms. This, ostensibly innocent feature, does appear to be an eccentric political motif and raises searching questions about the consistency and development of his epistemic and theopolitical praxis of his ILT. Freire has observed that 'avoidance of dialogue with the people under the pretext of organizing them, of strengthening revolutionary power, or of ensuring a united front' can be highly problematic (Freire, 2000, 129). He also admonishes that,

> it would be a false premise to believe that activism (which is not true action) is the road to revolution. People will be truly critical … if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naive knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the causes of reality. If revolutionary leaders deny this right to the people, they impair their own capacity to think—or at least to think correctly. Revolutionary leaders cannot think without the people, nor for the people, but only with the people. (Freire, 2000, 131)

Conclusion

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The title of Esack's book Quran, Liberation and Pluralism, is indicative of the questions and insights that impel and describe his theopolitical journey. Each of the three words represent key discursive sites within which much of his theological and political meditations, and churning narrative identity were forged.

The Quran, in Esack's imagination, offered a vision and rationale for challenging and opposing historical boundaries and cultural/political constructs which were found to be socially and personally restrictive and repressive. But his individuality and subjectivity also intersected with other social and political narratives of the period 1970s - 1980s in SA: Black consciousness, anti-apartheid liberalism, pan-africanism, socialism, neo-liberal African nationalism etc. The ensuing discursive bricolage opposed apartheid and, in varying degrees, other forms of marginalization such as gender too. Although Esack often alluded to socio-economic exploitation, a slogan in line with the popular rhetoric of the time, class, as symbolic of a specific critique of racial capitalism, was not conceptualised nor particularly prominent within his deliberations.

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For the young Esack the world had four axes, home, school, the streets and religion. Home life was often fierce and unpredictable. Sustenance and succour was insufficient and irregular. The streets were more abject. School presented a brief exciting and regular respite. It allowed for the opportunity to learn, improve and express his thespian inclinations. However, the social and sacred practices and day to day cultural patterns orchestrated under the baton of the Quran promised more. It created safe, stable, dependable social niches and rituals which enabled survival, self-worth and sanity. For a frightened, inquisitive and vivacious young mind, an encompassing relationship with the Quran and the subcultures around it offered, amidst severe adversity and deprivation, a palpable narrative structure with a past (inspirational mythology and epic stories), present (practical, ideological and personal structure) and future (a life as

orator, leader and teacher anchored in the language and metaphor of the Quran). It's very practical promise carried a soulful song (Qira'ah), intellectual discipline and stimulation, and equally, if not more, important an 'extended family' who shared and cared.

The Quran continues to be a compelling matrix of meaning and morality. It is a source of inspiration and ideas. Its sweeping theosophical legacy maps a path to askesis[37]. The Quran, for Esack, encourages a creative and caring social imaginary through a network of values and concepts (as we will show in the chapter 3: hermeneutical keys). It comes alive in Esack's experience as a tantalizing 'text' whose cultural, ideological and sacred 'intertextures' perplexes even while it propels his pilgrimage. Its basic imagery and exhortations – kindness, forbearance, social equity, courtesy and finesse, integrity, and transpersonal accountability - provide discursive profusion and personal ballast while enabling and affirming his cosmopolitan bent. Its aesthetics, particularly through the disciplined timbres and rhythms of its many inspired – heard and imagined – chants, voices and melodies, enthrals as it soothes. Esack emphasises, especially in his later interviews, 'My relationship with the Quran is intense, intimate and largely ineffable.'

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The idea of liberation began as an instinctive reaction to the needless economic and racial repression and exclusion of apartheid. Empathy and solidarity were existential expressions of a life shared in deprivation. Esack recalls, during his IS phase, 'the many times when my brother and I went around knocking on the doors of neighbours to ask for a piece of bread or

[37] In "Technologies of Self" (Foucault, 1994, 239), the late Foucault speculates: What are the principal features of askesis? They include exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed. It is a question of testing the preparation. Is this truth assimilated enough to become ethics so that we can behave as we must when an event presents itself? They include exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed. It is a question of testing the preparation. Is this truth assimilated enough to become ethics so that we can behave as we must when an event presents itself?

scavenging in the gutters for discarded apple cores and the like' (1997, 2). On another occasion he reminds us that 'my early life as a victim of apartheid and poverty, seeing my mother finally succumb under the burden of economic exploitation and patriarchy, filled me with an abiding commitment to a comprehensive sense of justice' (ibid, 2).

To the more mature Esack, the gathering momentum of the SA liberation struggle, 1980s – 90s, and moribund apartheid edifice, suggested several personal and political trajectories and opportunities. His ready repartee, eloquence and well sequenced ideas entangled easily with the raging, mainly eclectic populist, resistance rhetoric of the period. During his IS phase Esack is decisively attuned to and dependent upon the rhythms and rituals of subaltern survival and subsistence strategies. With the advent of Esack's SRA phase we witness certain critical transitions. First, his struggle, as a member of and on the margins, is transposed from the shared quotidian survival site, of the subaltern, to a more structured acknowledged and privileged one. Here the lure of verticalist organizational status and the many self-aggrandizing enticements offered, engenders a habitus with a direct bearing on praxis (Esack, 1997: 234-9). As everyday experience on the margins and the refractions of Fanon[38], Freire, Cabral, Sartre, the Zapatistas and many organic activists have admonished, this verticalist 'praxis' is an alienating terrain of contestation.

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Esack's polemics suggest that his resistance discourse emphasised two personal hegemonic struggles. Both these struggles subsisted mainly on the ideological plane. The term ideology used here is derived from Thompson's view of ideology as a practice that operates in processes of meaning production in everyday life, whereby meaning is mobilised in order to maintain certain relations of power (Thompson 1990).

[38] The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary. Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism [recolonization] (Fanon, 1961). (see Esack 1997; 250)

The first struggle has two objects of censure, a 'conservative, collaborationist theology' and 'militant Islam'. In the context of the anti-apartheid struggle and the light of the many subtle and insightful liberatory discourses of the 1980s, Esack's labelling lacks cogency and fails to problematize[39] the broader multi-level landscape of contestation adequately. The second, despite the radical rhetoric Esack espouses, was articulated in a manner which, through his political calculus and praxis, coincided with the interests and logic of a nationalist neo-liberal solution as epitomised by the ANC (Esack, 1997: 234-9). As the analyses of Saul (2014), Marais (2011), Kasrills (2013), Terreblanche (2012) and others have concurred and observed

> On the one hand, as we have seen, capital (both local and global) was increasingly on side, its conviction growing that the ANC was the one force that could actually deliver an insurgent population to acceptance of a deal quite unthreatening in substance both to capital as well as to those whites who were securely lodged in the upper strata of society. On the other hand, however, there was the insurgent proletariat and precariat (as represented, notably, by COSATU and the UDF): yet they too were being brought, slowly but surely, to heel by the ANC – the rank and file of both proletariat and precariat now to be rendered politically, as we have suggested above, as presumptive 'citizens' rather than as assertive and active comrades in a continuing struggle for genuine liberation. (Saul, 2014, 121)

Pluralism, the third quilting point. The genealogy of this word overlaps with those of the other two and encapsulates Esack struggle to free his discursive theopolitical heritage from a decidedly stifling exclusivism, prejudice and political apathy. What should be clarified here, is that 'his struggle', as an ILT, while overlapping with others', does not necessarily reflect the experiences and emphases of Muslim activists in the South African context generally.

It is germane at this point to note that, in view of Esack's tortuous personal journey from proletariat to professor, individuals rarely invent general relevance criteria of their own (e.g. in politics, medicine, ecology or economics). Instead, particularly in an emotionally charged

[39] To problematize is to respond to a situation not with a solution that might end discussion or action but with a question that might open up new possibilities.

atmosphere, they tend to rely heavily on the collective vocabulary and the semantics of the most influential political or technical sociolects[40] as disseminated by the general media: 'The discourses they turn to in order to get by in everyday life are produced by these group languages and have a narrative structure (they tell a 'story') (Zima, 2015: 11).

Having approximately located Esack through the IS and SRA co-ordinates on the bio-political plane, our next inquiry probes the efforts of a mature Esack as he grapples with the principles and precepts of a legitimate reading of the Quran. How does the sacred scripture inform our praxis *apropos* of personal development and responsibility, social conscience, valid knowledge and life-purpose? Indeed, does the discursive context, an intertexture of modernist, post-modernist and postcolonial narratives, which prompts such an interrogatory framing itself not constitute a restrictive imposition on the meaning and significance of the text?

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[40] The sociolects or group languages of peer groups, political parties or ideological movements are given in the same way as technical languages, the languages of advertising and science. Assuming that behaviour is primarily adaptive and imitative, one can argue that, in many respects, the individual and the group are over- determined by society and language. (Zima, 2015, 11)

Chapter 2

Her-meneutics or His-manipulation

A pertinent tale

> A fox who lived in the deep forest of long ago had lost its front legs. No one knew how: perhaps escaping from a trap.
> A man who lived on the edge of the forest, seeing the fox from time to time, wondered how in the world it managed to get its food. One day when the fox was not far from him he had to hide himself quickly because a tiger was approaching. The tiger had fresh game in its claws. Lying down on the ground, it ate its fill, leaving the rest for the fox.
>
> Again the next day the great Provider of this world sent provisions to the fox by this same tiger. The man began to think:
> "If this fox is taken care of in this mysterious way, its food sent by some unseen Higher Power, why don't I just rest in a corner and have my daily meal provided for me?"
> Because he had a lot of faith, he let the days pass, waiting for food. Nothing happened. He just went on losing weight and strength until he was nearly a skeleton.
> Close to losing consciousness, he heard a Voice which said:
> "O you, who have mistaken the way, see now the Truth! You should have followed the example of that tiger instead of imitating the disabled fox."

This study intends to demonstrate that both the hermeneutics and theopolitical praxis, claimed by Esack to be in the interests of the marginalised, are theoretically and historically questionable and aporetic[41]. In this regard, this chapter has three primary foci. First, it will retrieve Esack's notion of hermeneutics as articulated and defended by him in QLP. Second, it will attempt to identify and uncover the theoretical traditions upon which he relies to develop his hermeneutics and the, explicit and implicit, concepts that shape and impel his theopolitical arguments. Third, it will assess the epistemic and basic semantic and conceptual coherence of his position vis-à-vis the traditions upon which he draws and the logic he deploys.

[41] As pointed out in footnote number 5 (pg. 2) , the term aporia is used in this sense throughout this dissertation. For a more detailed discussion, see Rescher (2009) An apory will be understood as a group of individually plausible but collectively incompatible theses. For the sake of illustration, the following cluster of contentions constitutes an apory:
1. What the sight of our eyes tells us is to be believed.
2. Sight tells us the stick is bent.
3. What the touch of our hands tells us is to be believed.
4. Touch tells us the stick is straight.
Here each thesis may seem undividedly plausible, but they conjoin to issue in inconsistency.

Contextualizing the Exercise

As described earlier, Esack is an activist (1997, 9) of a particular ilk with, as he would argue, an agenda often displaying direct, subtle and nuanced dimensions (1997, 10). His hermeneutics, he would declare, is unashamedly bias (1997, 10, 16). This bias, however, as will be demonstrated, is not simply an innocent expression of 'subaltern interests' as Esack's rhetoric attempts to imply.

It should also be noted that Esack describes his 'search for a South African qur'anic hermeneutic of pluralism for liberation' as one which 'was rooted in the fusion of our nation's crucible and my own commitment to comprehensive justice' (1997, 9). However, the actual formalisation and codification of his ideas occurred in the highly stimulating and resourceful intellectual and institutional environment offered by the UK during that period (1988 – 1997). This period in South Africa was very turbulent – a people at war with the state machinery of apartheid. The irony disclosed in this paragraph will later be related to Esack's idea of praxis and his theopolitical rhetoric.

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Motivation and Rationale

Esack announces, as he commences his journey into Qur'anic hermeneutics, that,

> My objectives in the present work (QLP) are fourfold. To show that it is possible to live in faithfulness to both the Quran and to one's present context… To advance the idea of Qur'anic hermeneutics as a contribution to the development of theological pluralism within Islam. To re-examine the way the Quran defines self and other (believer and non-believer) in order to make space for the righteous and just other in a theology of pluralism for liberation. To explore the relationship between religious exclusivism and one form of political conservatism (support for apartheid) on the one hand, and religious inclusivism and one form of progressive politics (support for the

> liberation struggle) on the other, and to supply a Qur'anic rationale for the latter.[42] (1997, 9, 14)

Furthermore,

> The pertinent issues for a Qur'anic hermeneutic of religious pluralism for liberation are: an intrinsic link between conservative theology and status quo ideology, however unjust or immoral the latter may be. Peaceful interreligious coexistence, however long it may have lasted, does not automatically translate into conscious religious pluralism. Muslims valued their shared lives with the Other and were resentful of any attempts to disrupt them. Yet, this has been accompanied by a sense of religious superiority and a denial of salvation to anyone who did not share their religious affiliation[43]. People's lives are not shaped by a text as much as it is shaped by the context. (1997, 43-44)

The previous quote is emblematic of Esack's aporetic hermeneutics. One, it infers simplistic linear correlations as in 'an intrinsic link between conservative theology and status quo ideology'. Two, its description of interfaith relations is contrived and based on untenable stereotyping. Three, he seems to propose a hermeneutic postulate about how people's lives are shaped, which appears more as a convenient ideological oversimplification? Regarding the latter point, three, it is particularly pertinent in view of the following observations; 1) Esack's own views on the role of the Qur'an in his life which, based on the bio-political evidence, was a major determinant in his personal trajectory. Esack's personal trajectory was very different from those of his siblings, and 2) Victor Frankel's reflections[44]. Nonetheless, Esack reminds us that 'This work primarily focuses on rethinking approaches to the Quran and to the

[42] This binary, in the context of the multiple liberatory narratives of the time in South Africa and Esack's political praxis (his rhetoric, organizational predilections) can be misleading.

[43] While, it is true that bigotry exists in many forms and contexts and in all religions and ideologies, Esack's claim verges perilously on being a travesty of the reality.

[44] Consider Victor Frankel's (1905-1997) views; "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." (1946).

theological categories of exclusion and inclusion rooted in the struggle for freedom from economic exploitation and racial discrimination.' (1997, 9)

Definition

The basic description of hermeneutics that Esack (1997, 51) builds upon is derived from Braaten (1966, 131) who defines hermeneutics as: '…the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in a past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation. It involves both methodological rules to be applied in exegesis as well as the epistemological assumptions of understanding.'Esack expands (1997, 51), 'Since Bultmann … hermeneutics is "generally used to describe the attempt to span the gap between past and present. (Ferguson, 1986, 5)"'[45]. Esack further attempts to advance his campaign by enlisting Bultmann's (1955, 251) proclamation that it would be 'absurd to demand from any interpreter the setting aside of his/her subjectivity and interpret the text without preunderstanding and the questions initiated by it (because without these) the text is mute.' However, even though Braaten explicitly regards the epistemological aspect as definitive, Esack seems preoccupied with the idea that readers from different contexts should have an 'unbounded' license to interpret for particular partisan interests. He clearly says 'knowledge is never neutral' (1997, 72, 16). In an effort to reinforce this claim, Esack cites Segundo who pronounces that 'every hermeneutic entails conscious or unconscious partisanship… even when it believes itself to be neutral.' (1997, 72). I regard these statements as 'bold and simplistic' because, as illustrated later, a central thrust of the hermeneutic endeavour has been precisely to avoid such conclusions (see Cabral, Grosfoguel, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Eco amongst others). It is also simplistic because it glosses over, deflects, the complex relationship

[45] Esack's partiality towards Bultmann's views makes one wonder about Franz Buri's charge - that Bultmann's theology ultimately reduces to an anthropology

between reflexive[46] subjectivity, structure/habitus[47], meaning in relation to paradigm/episteme[48] and iterability[49]/undecidability[50]. It seems reasonable to conclude that both, Esack and Segundo, operate with a theoretically inchoate and ineffectual reductionist notions of relativism and subjectivity.

Esack's next step is to argue the case for 'reception hermeneutics' (RH). According to Esack, in the South African experience, 'Muslims did not argue about the nature of the Quran; instead they differed on its role and ways of understanding it.' (1997, 51). In view of this, he contends that reception hermeneutics (RH) would be the most suitable hermeneutic approach in the South African context, since 'RH focuses on the process of interpretation and how different individuals and groups have appropriated it' ('it', is not clear what Esack means with it, presumably the text and not the methodology) (1997, 52). Moreover, RH is 'the study of the meaning of that text' (1997, 52). He affirms his choice by contrasting it with 'historical positivism, which would incline towards a fixed meaning' and citing Schussler-Fiorenza (1990, 23) who explains that reception hermeneutics 'would include within the task of interpretation the problem of the shift in horizons of diverse audiences and the transformation between past and present horizons of expectations toward the text.' Esack reminds us that 'RH does not try to recover an author's elusive intention. Instead, it studies the contributions to the ongoing

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[46] 'The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes' (Archer, 2007: 5).

[47]Habitus thereby brings together both objective social structure and subjective personal experiences: "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality" (1977b: 72). (Grenfell, 2010, 53)

[48] Episteme … the system of concepts that defines knowledge for a given intellectual era. (Gutting, 2005)

[49] Iterability accounts for the universalization necessary for the institution of something as an object of knowledge and undecidability implies a heterogeneity that precedes the discursive division in oppositions and dualities such as truth and falsity, inside and outside, presence and absence. (Direk and Lawlor, 2014, 6)

[50] What Derrida calls the 'undecidable' always results from a semantical effect of syntax that cannot itself be excluded from any regular system of writing. Although this effect involves, as I shall argue, a kind of essential crossing or confusion between the internal, rule governed structure of a system and its external 'meaning' or semantics, it essentially cannot be captured by any analysis that works on the level of semantic meaning alone. (Livingston, 2009, 6)

ever-changing understandings of a text' (1997, 63).

Esack further contends that hermeneutics or, as he also defines it, the search for meaning, is inexorably delimited by the following assumptions:

> For me the fundamental question remains: 'for whom and in whose interests' does one pursue the hermeneutical task?' (73). How does Esack distinguish or equate his personal and political proclivities and aspirations from those of the oppressed?
>
> The locus of meaning for people is persons (1997: 63). Is there a difference (or indeed what is the relationship) between 'meaning' and 'valid knowledge'?
>
> …people also make truth. (1997, 10). Are people able to discover 'truth' or 'valid knowledge'? How is this 'truth' made? Are the results and processes contested? What criteria are used? Are these criteria of a 'universal', 'particular', other nature?
>
> …there is no innocent interpretation. (1997, 75). Does this suggest 'anything goes? Does might determine right?
>
> …a pluralism of splendid and joyous intellectual neutrality is not an option. I argue for the freedom to rethink the meanings and use of scripture … to advance the liberation of all people. (1997, 78). Esack does not engage nor problematise the multiple liberatory discourses in SA. His ILT was articulated to a particular hegemonic project. The outcome of the latter raises searching questions about simplistic nature of his assertions and claims.
>
> 'Interpretations, and therefore meaning, are always partial' (1997, 16, 75)

At this point, it seems evident that Esack's Quranic hermeneutic of religious pluralism for liberation hinges upon two trite truisms. First, that 'interpreters are people,' (1997, 10, 12, 50, 51, 52, 62, 73-78) each of whom, he maintains, purportedly, have their own exceedingly

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peculiar and incommensurable hopes, prejudices and aspirations and, second, that there exists 'a telling' relationship between text and context (49, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60*, 60, 61, 62, 63, 73-78).

As they stand, without any qualification in Esack's argument/writings, these assertions tend to suggest that texts and contexts provide boundless playing fields, without error, accuracy, dependability or validity, that cater to every peculiar partisan individual semantic caprice. It should be noted that, apart from a few random quotes, Esack nowhere attempts to offer an extended and adequate theoretical[51] and/or philosophical analysis of the relationship between subjectivity, language, text, context, concept/object and meaning and how these concepts are modulated by questions of universality and particularity. What he does present as 'a theory' will be dealt with in a separate section.

Esack is aware of the semantic and ideological contradictions inherent in his unqualified pluralist and relativist approach to interpretation. The defence he offers, 'when we do not address the question "For whom and in whose interests?", then pluralism simply becomes "a passive response to more and more possibilities none of which shall ever be practised.'"(1997, 78) is unconvincing as noted above. Suave as this appears, it will be demonstrated that, as is the case with most of Esack's key concepts, the justification is inconsistent and not sufficiently demonstrated. Moreover, while the word epistemology appears twice in his section on hermeneutics and is central to Bultmann's definition of hermeneutics, Esack doesn't devote anytime to issues regarding valid knowledge and how rationality, relativism, objectivism, and fallibilism or scepticism condition the nature and value of knowledge production and meaning-

[51] A theory is a system of assumptions, principles, and relationships posited to explain a specified set of phenomena. Theories often carry with them an implicit metatheory and methodology, as in the "rules of procedure" (American Heritage Dict., 1969).

making (i.e. how we know, relate and feel our way through the world).

Justification

This section interrogates Esack's defence of the methodological and hermeneutic choices he makes. As testified by his motivation, Esack's predilection is clear: 'People's lives are not shaped by a text as much as it is shaped by the context.' (1997, 43-44) Hence, Esack proposes to provide a theological and historical vindication for 'a contextual approach to the Quran itself and the role of people in elaborating its meaning.' (1997, 49). This part of his argument is substantiated by three supporting elements.

First, the 'progressive' (or gradual, *tadrij*) form of the revelation of the Quran. This principle he argues is supported by the 'fact' that the revelation spanned a period of 23 years, with the obvious attendant circumstantial vicissitudes, and the Quran's self-description 'a Quran which we only gradually unfolded so that you may recite it to the people step-by-step and (therefore) We have revealed it only in pieces. (17: 106).' (1997, 55)

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Second, the outlook of some traditional Islamic scholars, whose views resonate partially with Esack's propositions, such as Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi[52] (d. 1762)'who developed an elaborate theory of the relationship between revelation and context.' (1997, 55). Esack explains, 'According to Dehlawi, the ideal form of *din*, which he interprets to mean primordial ideal religion, corresponds to the ideal form of nature. "Actualised manifestations of the ideal form descend in successive revelations depending on the particular material and historical

[52] Notably, Esack cites an aspect of Dehlawi's work (as above) to support his 'contextual approach'. He also acknowledges Dehlawi's 'notion of the Unity of Being, where everything is closely integrated, (and) he emphasises the interrelation of the cosmic, divine, terrestrial and human powers and its effects on the universe.' Esack, however, doesn't see the need to integrate the latter 'holistic' dimension of Dehlawi's thinking into his hermeneutic approach. This is another illustration of Esack's 'selective pastiche' reasoning which recur throughout and characterise his works. See Izutsu quote page 11.

circumstances" (Hermansen, 1985, 147) of the recipient community.' (1997, 55).

Third, *asbab al-nuzul* (events occasioning revelation) and *naskh* (abrogation, clarification, or particularisation of earlier revelations). In explaining the one part of his criteria, Esack first describes 'events occasioning revelation' as 'simultaneously clear and ambiguous'. (1997, 56). Esack uses *asbab* to bolster his argument while simultaneously admitting its ostensible undependability. For Esack, however, the significance of 'events' is 'the question of the historicity and contextuality of the text.' (1997, 56). He concludes this section with a quote from Maududi (1988, 3) who asserts that 'the occasions of revelation is of extreme importance and numerous verses will remain incomprehensible without it.' As it stands, both Rahman and Esack seem to incline towards a simple empiricist reading of history and an anthropomorphic notion of the transcendent.

On the subject of *naskh*, Esack informs us that 'The significance attached to *naskh* may be gauged from the fact that a large number of independent works were produced on the subject.' (1997, 58). Nonetheless, he reports that 'a number of latter-day reformists … and contemporary scholars rejected *naskh*.' (1997, 58). Given this ambiguity, it is unclear why and how he intends to use it. In closing this part Esack asserts, somewhat uncertainly, that 'Whatever the various opinions surrounding *naskh*, there is unanimity about what Fazlur Rahman describes as "the situational character of the Quran."' (Rahman, 1966, 10). Esack continues, 'Both the entire revelation as well as specific verses were generally revealed within the context of particular social conditions. As Muslim society was taking shape, the Quranic revelation kept up with the changing conditions and environment' (Esack, 1997, 59).

One could ask the ordinary but instructive, question, does the previous claim by Esack

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constitute a hermeneutic insight or is it merely a tautology? 'Both the entire revelation as well as specific verses were generally revealed within the context of particular social conditions' (ibid). I am inclined to read it as being a mere tautology.

After all, where else would one expect historico-empirical revelation to occur? Esack seems indifferent to the task of uncovering an iterable pattern which could relate text to context and other theological variables in an etiologically more meaningful manner.

It is significant at this juncture to note a recurring feature of Esack's general discourse, his methodological indifference, if not disdain, towards traditional Islamic scholarship. While it is not within the scope of this dissertation to examine the full scope of this question, a brief digression seems in order. On the question of text and context for example, Esack maintains that classical Muslim scholars have not adequately studied the relationship between the exegetes' horizons and her exegesis nor, he continues, do they adequately account for the social, political and philosophical assumptions underlying their theology. (Esack, 1997: 61-2). These claims remain unsupported. Esack does not offer any rigorous independent study which wrestles with the methodology, discursive milieu, and political context of the schools of thought or scholars he so summarily jettisons. In practice, Esack (1997: 56-7) implies that an oblique comment or two from Rippin is sufficient to support his stance. Esack's approach also seems to suggest, for instance, that the work of Al-Suyuti (d. 1505), widely regarded as a veritable polymath and prolific author, does not offer him sufficient substance and structure for a generative dialogue.

As a notable counterpoint to Esack's approach we briefly describe and consider the approach of Hamid Nasr Abu Zaid (d. 2010). Abu Zayd is critical of several aspects of the premodern Muslim intellectual legacy, particularly the Ash'arite school. While Abu Zayd's hermeneutic theory marks an appreciable shift away from (not dismissal of) certain strands of the traditional

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Islamic discourse and hermeneutics in particular, unlike Esack, the manner in which he engages this 'effective-history' allows the subtleties and sophistication of the legacy to inform and invigorate his unfolding paradigm. He achieves this by 1) clearly demarcating his theoretical principles and conceptual apparatus, and 2) by allowing his readers/interlocutors to join him, through extensive citations and annotations, in a critical and constructive dialogue with the legacy. The point here is not that Esack and/or Rippin is wrong. Rather, it seems methodologically delinquent to treat such a rich and dynamic tradition so offhandedly. Perhaps another instance of Esack sensing the need to privilege ideology over methodology.

Despite a few token gestures to the transcendent, Esack manoeuvres with an anthropomorphism and linear instrumental logic implying a modernist and affected detached cynicism (1997: 10, 63)[53] through most of his (written) ruminations (1997, 52-54). For instance, what are we expected to deduce from the previous annotations and the expression which concludes that 'Quranic revelation kept up with changing conditions and environment' as it relates to revelation, meaning, logic, history, the secular, and the transcendent?

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Clearly several theosophical and elementary metaphysical questions have been circumvented by Esack. Reflecting on this simple illustration, it is noticeable that Esack does not pause to ponder the merits or demerits of his basic linear empiricist logic. His reasoning here seems to be an instance of the Post hoc ergo propter hoc: (literally "after this, therefore because of this") fallacy of arguing that one event was caused by another event merely because it occurred after that event. The linear empiricist logic and anthropomorphism is quite plain here. To highlight the latter observation, contrast his simple literalism with some representative alternative

[53] According to Muslims, God is utterly beyond history (1997: 10). Also see his remarks on page 63 (1997). Esack refers to this as 'their' dilemma. First this sweeping statement is untenable and indicative of reductionism. Second, in the absence of a procedure for problematizing and nuancing this kind of cultural proposition, Esack's remark suggests a cynical modernist and theologically patronizing tone.

theological and philosophical approaches to the question of revelation, history, interpretation and related matters. Beach (2006, 269) reminds us that; ‘According to Barth, within the realm of human conceptions and patterns of thought, no theory of cognition is possible that can embrace revelation’ (Beach, 2006, 269).

Izutsu (1971, 8) asks the question about the relationship between the phenomenal world and the underlying reality, revelation and reason, text and context. What vision of reality is required to appreciate/apprehend the complexity, and how is it obtainable as a matter of actual experience? He offers an answer predicated upon a Qur’anic cosmology where he contends that

> To this crucial question the Islamic philosophy of "existence" answers by saying that it is obtainable only through an "inner witnessing" (shuhud), "tasting" (dhawq), "presence" (hudur), or "illumination" (ishraq). Whatever these technical terms exactly mean, and to whatever degree they may differ from one another, it will be evident in any case that such an experience of Reality is not actualizable as long as there remains … in man the ego-consciousness. The empirical ego is the most serious hindrance in the way of the experience of "seeing by self-realization". For the subsistence of the individual ego places of necessity an epistemological distance between man and the reality of "existence". The reality of existence is immediately grasped only when the empirical selfhood is annihilated.

Breton (2004, 133) urges us to remember that natural religious inclinations, ‘must always be accompanied by a critical countermovement which reminds us that God cannot ultimately be objectified or immobilized in ontological or institutional (that is, anthropomorphic) structures.’

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Esack's theological propositions and arguments appear simplistic and anthropomorphic because they are neither preceded nor accompanied by the appropriate conceptual[54] and methodological elaboration or clarification. In an earlier remark (1997, 56) he expresses his ambivalence regarding the nature of the relationship between revelation/text and context. On that occasion he displays awareness but actually dodges the ideas of immanentism and interventionism, central to both Christian (Murphy, 2007)[55] and Islamic (Dobie, 2010)[56] thought. He dithers over this relationship. For instance, he seems to demur when he says 'To render sabab as 'cause' would suggest that the event created the text and I am not sure whether I want to fly into the face of orthodoxy[57] as directly as this;' He does however often, as demonstrated above, simply disregard not only orthodoxy but also alternative epistemic and logical methodologies that challenge the linear empiricist modes that typify his thought (Esack, 1997, 56). Although he uses 'events occasioning revelation' in defence of his approach, he also bemoans it as being 'simultaneously a clear and ambiguous rendition' (ibid).

Such vacillation, in addition to Esack's precarious epistemic and conceptual stance, makes it awkward for him to engage the arguments of the orthodoxy or alternative views constructively. It also undermines his general thesis and particular argument insofar as he wants to draw conclusions about the transcendent, text and context without sufficiently problematizing the

[54] A conceptual system is not a collection of holistic images of the sort that a camera, video recorder, or audio recorder captures. Instead a conceptual system is a collection of category knowledge, where each represented category corresponds to a component of experience—not to an entire holistic experience. (Barsalou, 2003, 514). Esack does not offer a coherent conceptual schema (metalanguage) for his hermeneutics or theopolitics. He relies instead on eclectic everyday scattered connotations, which aggravate the already aporetic nature of his thesis.

[55] Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism – Nancy Murphy (2007, 62-85)

[56] Logos and Revelation – Robert Dobie (2010, 93-123)

[57] It seems Esack assumes that the reader will know that the term Orthodoxy refers to the Ahlu Sunnah and more specifically the Ash'ari School. Esack leaves the notion of orthodoxy as a vague floating signifier. It would have been more helpful had he given an example of al-Ghazali's view, since Ghazali is one of the major representatives of the Orthodoxy, as for instance exemplified in Ghazali's description of the Ash'ari School (Ahlu Sunnah), (Al-Ghazli, Abu Hamid, *Al-Mankhul min ta'liqat al-usul*, pp. 7-8).

metalanguage and phenomenology of the discourse nor adequately engaging the literary and theosophical histories.

One might wonder how a sustained engagement with questions such as ontological appropriateness, epistemological pluralism, methodological trustworthiness, analytical generalizability and construct validity would affect the architectonic and operationalization of his hermeneutics. Would his linear binary empiricist logic, for example, be augmented or transcended? These and related theological and metaphysical questions, the kind requiring greater conceptual and architectonic sophistication and coherence, are generally eluded by Esack.

Esack's attempt to provide a theological and historical vindication for 'a contextual approach to the Quran itself and the role of people in elaborating its meaning' (1997, 49) is unconvincing for several reasons.

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Firstly, he vacillates between unqualified constructivist and realist (see footnote 25) notions of meaning. He asserts the Quran has 'its intrinsic meaning'[58], but 'people also make truth' (1997, 10, 111). He doesn't explain how the nuance or tension between 'contrived and arrived' meaning should be theologically and conceptually managed. Is there an independent arbiter between subjectivity, context, text, zeitgeist, episteme etc.? Do we have another route through these questions?

Secondly, as just mentioned, he seems more concerned about the reproof of the Orthodoxy than

[58] The uncritical imposition of the requirements of the struggle…onto the text is to deprive the struggle of the visionary insights that…the Quran is capable of supplying. (Esack, 1997, 106)

articulating a plausible theological position. The theological defence appears shaky because the terms text, context, situation, and history, if not scrupulously demarcated or discursively articulated are no more than floating signifiers. Next, his intertextual citations, meant to support his argument, are used eclectically and devoid of narrative cohesion or thematization. This applies to his appropriation of Dehlawi, Rahman, Maududi and Fiorenza. His appropriation of Fiorenza will be afforded more attention when we examine his defence of RH.

We illustrate this general intertextual problem with reference to several aspects of Esack's utilization of and commentary on Rahman which discloses several aporia and problematics. For instance, he criticizes Rahman's view of 'Islam's pitiable subjugation of religion to politics … rather than genuine Islamic values controlling politics' by retorting that Rahman fails to acknowledge 'the dialectical relationship between the two' (Esack, 1997, 67). This raises at least three questions. First, Esack uses the idea of a 'dialectical relationship'[59] very loosely to either justify or criticise a position depending on his polemical needs. Given the complex genealogy of the word, it is reasonably expected of him to provide conceptual clarity of such a relationship. Second, elsewhere, he clearly accedes that the Quran has independent 'visionary insights' (see footnote 16) which should not be stifled by political clamour. This seems no different from Rahman's exhortation (cited above). Third, he faults Rahman for failing to recognise the dialectical relationship between the binaries such as politics/religion; text/context for example. However, in touting his preference, he often insists that 'lives are not shaped by text as much as it is by context' (Esack, 1997, 44), 'text as pretext' (ibid, 73) (for affected

[59] For Kant, dialectics refers to the frustrating and inclusive results that arise whenever reason transgresses its proper limits by attempting to investigate the ultimate nature of things. Hegel asks, must we take the opposed positions as complete and independent? Another, far better option is available: to recognize that the apparently opposed positions only offer one-sided accounts of a complex reality. 'Truth is the whole,' he famously claims. The key to Hegel's notion of dialectic is the movement to a positive result in which previously antagonistic positions are reconciled within a higher-order framework (Pinkard, 1987) (Ollman and Smith, 2008, 3). Esack offers no application/appreciation of 'reason transgressing', nor 'reconciled within a higher order'.

political aspirations), and 'neutrality or objectivity in such a (oppressive) context is, in fact, a sin' (ibid, 106), thus merely shifting the emphasis to the preferred opposite extremity. This seems to flout the loose notion of the dialectic he insinuates – that of crude balance. Another curious feature of Esack's criticisms of Rahman is where he decries Rahman's approach as that of one who 'reads into Quran whatever conforms to the requirements of God-consciousness and social justice' (Esack, 1997, 67), while on other occasions Esack asserts that the Quran 'asks to be read through the eyes of a commitment to the destruction of oppression and … the establishment of justice,' and 'taqwa (integrity and awareness in relation to the presence of God) ensures that the Muslim walks in the grace of God.' (ibid, 90 and 106). Esack's circularity and confusion is quite clear. He also tends to disparage Rahman's notion of ***faith*** as a hermeneutical key, yet brashly asserts that 'the goals of this (his favoured political) interpreting community come from the ***depths of their humanity*** and are affirmed in the text beyond doubt.' (ibid, 97). Semantically, there might be a subtle difference, yet pragmatically the differences between the two categories, 'faith' and 'depths of humanity', seem trivial?

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Esack's use of inductive logic with arbitrary correlations is questionable. Here one of the immediate questions that arise is, is the relation between revelation and context a simple linear one? To answer affirmatively presupposes a plethora of complex questions. For instance, is omniscience reducible to simple linear modus ponens logic? Is revelation a function of an unpredictable history? Esack does not problematize these issues.

Acknowledging the 'situational character of the Quran' (Esack, 1997, 54) or insisting that revelation is 'vitally linked with its situational background' (ibid, 57) without a metaphysical hypotheses for interpreting the nexus does not constitute sufficient rationale for concluding the preponderance of context as a critical hermeneutic device. There are at least, in a very simplistic

model, two basic contexts, for instance, the present and original context of revelation. Each context will have internal horizontal and vertical mappings. Having established that, one then needs sufficient theoretical and empirical knowledge to be able to infer and transpose the second to the first. The latter description offers one such basic hypothesis. In the absence of an appreciable etiological schema, Esack;s approach remains tenuously inductive.

Eco imaginatively explains why such an approach is decidedly arbitrary

> (An) example of the ascription of pertinence to the wrong element provided by the theorists of scientific induction is the following: if a doctor notices that all his patients suffering from cirrhosis of the liver regularly drink either whisky and soda, cognac and soda, or gin and soda, and concludes from this that soda causes cirrhosis of the liver, he is wrong. He is wrong because he does not notice that there is another element common to the three cases, namely alcohol, and he is wrong because he ignores all the cases of teetotal patients who drink only soda and do not have cirrhosis of the liver. Now, the example seems ridiculous precisely because the doctor fixes upon what could be explained in other ways and not upon what he should have wondered about; and he does so because it is easier to notice the presence of water, which is evident, than the presence of alcohol.(1992, 49-50)

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Fourth, Esack's historical analysis, apart from, it's lack of conceptual clarity and slanted empirical character succumbs to classical holist and contrastive undertermination. Underdertermination is the basic idea that the evidence, to which we have access, at a particular moment may be insufficient to determine what beliefs we should hold in response to it. Or, expressed otherwise, "correlation does not imply causation". In Esack's case there is no effort to establish etiological models, correlation, nor formulate hypotheses that can be analytically or empirically/historically corroborated or tested. Esack's argument for a 'contextual approach to the Quran…' is fraught with unproblematised questions.

Reception Hermeneutics (RH)

This section will be devoted to 1) a brief critical examination of Fiorenza's arguments, since RH is one of the central features of Esack's hermeneutical position and Schussler-Fiorenza's writings his principal theoretical source (1997: 52, 73), 2) relate his RH to the reservations of an emerging deconstructive decolonial voice within quranic hermeneutics, and 3) demonstrate certain lapses in Esack's hermeneutic approach which would weaken his overall theopolitical argument.

The thrust of the argument from Fiorenza that appeals to Esack and ostensibly suits his hermeneutic project is her emphasis on 'the transformation between past and present horizons' (1997: 52). This seems reasonable. He then, however, cites her to advance the idea that past and present 'horizons' are historically and philologically incommensurable (1997: 73). Esack doesn't offer a theoretical analysis of these claims. He simply cites Fiorenza as an 'authority'.

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If these 'horizons' are incommensurable, several question are prompted. One, does a historical text have any meaning beyond the immediate situation-bound interpretation? This in turn raises questions about the relation, relevance and transformation process between past and present linguistically, semantically and historically. At what point in the flow of time does past end, present begin and eventually detach from future? How would the latter processes influence our 'horizons of intelligibility'?

The difficulty here would seem to arise from Esack's untheorized notions of history, language and the nature of cultural (dis)continuity and cohesion. His cause is more concerned with self-justification than coherent dependable interpretation. He does after all seem constrained by his

demand that the hermeneutical task is indubitably a political one and that text must serve as pretext for the objectives of the political (1997: 73).

Given Esack's reliance on Fiorenza, his approach is further compromised by the following critical observations regarding her theories and arguments. According to Kostenberger (2006, 124) Fiorenza's 'thesis has been rejected by feminist scholars such as Mary Rose D'Angelo (1992), Amy-Jill Levine (1994), and Kathleen Corley (1998, 2002) owing to its lack of historical support.' Furthermore, Ng (2002: 329) contends Fiorenza doesn't clearly acknowledge that 'her reconstruction is only one of several possible alternatives' and also 'questions the circularity evident in Fiorenza's approach that starts out with a particular ideology, finds its ideal expressed in a particular historical reconstruction (such as Jesus' "discipleship of equals"), and then finds evidence that supports its conclusions'.

Elliot's (2002, 90) views of Fiorenza's writings would seem to also apply to Esack when he stresses that:

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> Such an interpretative procedure appears [to be] more eisegesis than exegesis and deserves to [be] rejected as a[n] unhappy example [of] interpretive method. An anachronistic imputation of modern notions to the biblical authors should be challenged and resisted in the name of historical honesty wherever and however it occurs. To be sure, let us expend every ounce of energy it takes to reform the ills of society and church. But let us do so with historical honesty, respecting the past as past and not trying to recreate it with modern constructs or re-write it with new ideological pens.

Esack's discourse, notwithstanding its subaltern façade, is rooted inadvertently in modernist binaries, hierarchies and sensibilities and emblematic of the kind Hidayatullah (2014) has challenged. Offering a friendly, albeit critical, commentary on contemporary feminist and

liberationist exegesis, Hidayatullah urges circumspection. She asks whether modern quranic readings are sufficiently mindful of the hazards that accrue to the fact that by

> 'placing feminist(liberationist) demands on the Qur'an, we have projected a historically specific (and at the same time theoretically unclear) sense of 'gender/social justice' onto the text without fully considering how our demands might, in fact, be anachronistic and incommensurate with Qur'anic statements' … we often forget that our notions of equality/justice are guided by historical values … we have developed interpretive techniques and complex interpretive manoeuvres to try to prove that, in spite of what the text appears to mean, the Qur'an somehow coheres with our notion of gender/social egalitarianism … we [are] manipulating the text in our desire to derive textual support for our notions ... (2014, 150-151)

Does the text not offer an independent insight? Not for Esack and his very specific agenda! According to Esack 'RH does not try to recover an author's elusive intention. Instead, it studies the contributions to the ongoing and ever-changing understandings of a text.' (1997, 81)
As is his wont, Esack doesn't delimit what this 'ongoing and ever-changing understandings' mean, nor does he explain the methodology involved. What is the nature of these changes? Are they subtle, dramatic, mere refinements, subversions, ruptures, do they augment or inhibit?

A question that would vex his loose formulation of RH, is how do we, despite inevitable fluctuations, explain the stable aspects of a social/systemic identity? Indeed, on what bases do his corporate generalizations rest? Another way of stating this is to ask how does a system/movement achieve 'normative congruence', defined as the system's "ability to accommodate difference and dissensus, without losing its functional unity of purpose or sense of identity"? Painter-Morland (2008:224), argues that this is facilitated by downward causation

i.e. the system's ability to constrain individual components through feedback loops[60].

Another point to consider is the view that RH is premised on the fact that in reading we should be flexible and open-minded, prepared to put our beliefs into question and allow them to be transformed. An attitude, behind which, Eagleton suggests, lies 'the influence of Gadamerian hermeneutics, with its trust in that enriched self-knowledge which springs from an encounter with the unfamiliar.' (2003, 69). Further, argues Iser (1974, 1978), a prominent protagonist of RH, that a reader with strong ideological commitments is likely to be an inadequate one, since he or she is less likely to be open to the transformative power of literary works. In view of Iser's comment, Esack's insistence on a bias ideological and political reading would logically curtail his ability to appreciate the full grandeur of a text's pluralism.

According to Eagleton (2003, 73), RH of the Iser kind seems to raise a pressing epistemological problem.

> If one considers the 'text in itself as a kind of skeleton, a set of 'schemata' waiting to be concretized in various ways by various readers, how one can discuss these schemata at all without having already concretized them? In speaking of the 'text itself, measuring it as a norm against particular interpretations of it, is one ever dealing with anything more than one's own concretization?

Esack's inadvertent binary logic and undertow of Euromodernist sensibilities such as his selective empiricist rationality (1997: 75) places him, despite denials, at least partially, in a secularised discourse. This allows a recall of Mahmood's exhortation that:

[60]Language allows us to gain a sense of our own boundedness within a community of practice, but also allows communities of practice to develop by allowing us to express the distinctions in and between practices. Over time, our practices form iterative themes or patterns of coherence (which often take the form of narratives). Iterative themes aid in fostering a sense of corporate identity and purpose in self-organising systems. These iterative themes are also fed back to corporate/community members through a process of downward causation. In this sense, feedback loops also help to foster a sense of **normative congruence** within movements/corporations, and contribute to the "staying power" of various forms of identity.

> …contemporary calls for reforming Islam are built upon a narrow vision of a secularized conception of religiosity that mobilizes many of the liberal assumptions about what it means to be human in this world. The problem of this prescriptive vision of secularized religiosity lies in its singularity and certitude that brooks no argument and makes no adjustments for different ways of living, both religiously and politically. It is the telos of a liberal-democratic Protestant society—whose ethos is condensed in the cosmopolitan sensibilities and pleasures of its enlightened citizenry. (2011, 96)

A reasonable conclusion here could be that Esack operates with notions lacking conceptual substance and theoretical coherence and diligence.

How does Esack defend and/or articulate his pivotal concepts – Meaning, Subjectivism, Constructivism, Relativism and Pluralism?

There are several implicit and a few explicit notions Esack relies upon.

His commitment to a form of subjective relativism (and simple constructivism) is captured in the following quote. 'Contemporary hermeneutics alerts us to the false pretentions of objectivity or neutrality and the need to rehabilitate "the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices' (Gadamer, 1992, 261). (1997, 10).

We begin with the first part of this quote. The idea connoted by the expression 'the false pretensions of objectivity and neutrality' becomes thematised when placed alongside Esack's other postulates. On several occasions throughout his text Esack reminds us of his view. For instance, that 'interpretations, and therefore meaning, are always partial.' (1997, 73). 'For me the fundamental question remains: "for whom and in whose interests' does one pursue the hermeneutical task?"' (ibid.) and 'people also make truth.' (1997, 10).

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This 'simpleminded constructivism'[61] explicitly rejects all forms of ontology and exposes a flagrant inconsistency[62] (more on this later) in Esack's implied eclectic architectonic. Based on the content of his text and a basic history of the South African context, there were several different views/strategies available amongst the oppressed during the liberation struggle. Which 'people's truth', given the heterogeneous nature of popular liberatory narratives, did he agree with and how did he arrive at the answer? The question is germane, because he constantly reminds us that: …there is no innocent interpretation. (1997, 75)

> …the inevitability of bias (1997, 16, 13)

Since Esack doesn't offer more than these bald assertions, it can be inferred that one of his themes is a rather partisan form of subjectivism. Within the wider context of his rhetoric the meaning of this theme unfolds as a subjectivism bent on vindicating an unashamedly bias unqualified reader-oriented, context-circumscribed hermeneutic related to a particular questionable political agenda. This is a curious point because, as will be demonstrated, apart from the flagrantly bias liberationists' approaches, such as Esack's, the major hermeneutic trends, subaltern and Euromodernist, campaign vigorously and systematically against such theoretical rashness. An example of the more conscientious approach is cogently captured in the following arguments.

To illustrate the pertinence of this concern, we briefly, as a foil to Esack's superficial circular speculations, consider Ricoeur's more structured position (Blundell, 2010, 37-40) in relation to the question, how can hermeneutics *engage* objective scientific methodology without

[61] One telling objection to 'simple constructivism' concerns the strange causal powers that constructivism seems to assign to the mind, allowing it to ontologically constitute a world that doubtless existed before there even were minds. (Trout 1994:47). Did the matter of the brain not precede the consciousness of mind? Another, more burlesque, lampoon of this approach is presented by Sokal (1996), 'Anyone who believes that the laws of physics are mere social conventions is invited to try transgressing those conventions from the windows of my apartment. I live on the twenty-first floor.'

[62] On the one hand, 'people make truth', on the other there is an oppressive social order that must be transformed. Where does the latter truth and/or reality come from? A subjective construction or independent 'reality' (Esack, 1997, 67)? How does Esack account for the antinomy? He does not!

embracing the methodology and becoming *subordinated* to it? Ricoeur insists that he is not offering a "hermeneutics of the text," but rather a "hermeneutics based on the problematics of the text." He suggests four characteristics of textuality to be applied as a synergistic ensemble. 1) the relationship of speaking and writing, 2) structure, 3) the "world of the text," and 4) mediated self-understanding.

1. A text is decontextualized from its original author, intended reader, and situation, and is available to be recontextualized by anyone who reads it. In this way, distanciation[63] now belongs to the textual mediation itself, and is a positive aspect rather than a negative one.

2. A text is a deliberate composition with a unifying structure. The author plays the role of both artisan and speaker, and one must engage the artisan to reach the speaker. Hermeneutics has not strayed from its primary task of "identifying the discourse within the work," but Ricoeur argues that "this discourse is given nowhere else than in and by the structure of the work." As writing opened up a place for distanciation, structure opens up a place for objectification

3. The notion of reference when applied to a text in its entirety is what Ricoeur means by the world of the text. It is not the psychological intention of an author residing behind the text that is sought, but rather the projection of a world before the text that is mediated through the "matter" of the text itself. Ricoeur says: "The matter of the text is not what a naïve reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement

[63] According to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993), 'With regard to the hermeneutical thought of Ricoeur, the principal thing to note is the highlighting of the function of distantiation. This is the necessary prelude to any correct appropriation of a text. A first distancing occurs between the text and its author, for, once produced, the text takes on a certain autonomy in relation to its author; it begins its own career of meaning. Another distancing exists between the text and its successive readers; these have to respect the world of the text in its otherness.'

of the text mediates." There is no bypassing the distanciating and objectifying moments of interpretation in the quest to understand the discourse within the work.

4. Finally, the text not only discloses variations of my world, but also discloses variations of myself. In contrast to the philosophies that present the subject as immediate and self-transparent, Ricoeur argues that self-understanding must pass through "the detour of the signs of humanity sedimented in the works of culture." Distanciation and appropriation are related in a productive dialectic. Ricoeur is adamant that this not be taken as a cover for subjectivism. "It would be more correct to say that the self is constituted by the 'matter' of the text."

Unlike the brashness with which the Esack (1997) presents his case, in the ruminations of many grounded activists such as Freire, and Cabral and literary theorists Ricoeur and Gadamer, we discern a deep ethical and epistemic angst felt towards oversimplification and crude bias. Freire (1970, 2005, 39-40) reminds us 'Whereas the rightist sectarian, closing himself in "his" truth, does no more than fulfil a natural role, the leftist who becomes sectarian and rigid negates his or her very nature. Each, however, as he revolves about "his" truth, feels threatened if that truth is questioned'. Cabral (1965, 1974, 70-72) exhorts 'We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our Party life. Every responsible member must have the courage of his responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for his work and properly respecting the work of others. Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.'

Madison (1994, 2005, 245), offering a view markedly at variance with Esack's, liberal subjectivism, clearly illustrates Esack's oversimplification or misrepresentation of Gadamer, when he insists that "Understanding,' for Gadamer, is not so much 'a 'subjective' as it is an ontological process and that phenomenological hermeneutics is [as] adamantly opposed to all

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forms of objectivism, [as] *it is equally opposed to all forms of modern subjectivism*[64]. The central thrust of phenomenological hermeneutics is to move beyond both objectivism and subjectivism, which is to say, also, beyond relativism.' This latter observation is emphatically underscored by Gadamer (2004, 50, 278, 339 508) and Lawn and Keane (2011, 77, 110, 137) in the Gadamer dictionary.

However, according to Gadamer (2006, xxxiv) 'What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now.' Contrary to Esack's individualistic subjectivist insinuations, Gadamer is unwavering, 'the historical world is not a coherent experience of the subjective consciousness. Historical coherence must be understood as a coherence of meaning that wholly transcends the horizon of the individual's experience' (2004, 508).

Madison (1994, 250) maintains that Gadamer 'defends himself against the charge of subjectivism by maintaining that interpretation is never—indeed, can never be—the act of an isolated, monadic subject, for the subject's own self-understanding. It is inevitably a function of the historical tradition to which he or she belongs.' Moreover, asserts Madison (1994, 252-3) that, according to Gadamer

> Effective-history does not signal a limitation on our ability to understand (unless, of course, one wishes to contrast human understanding with divine understanding, in which case human understanding will always come out the loser) as much as it designates the positive and productive possibility of any understanding that lays claim to truth. To speak in traditional philosophical terms, effective-history is the very condition of possibility of understanding. Effective-history provides us with our 'enabling' presuppositions.

The second part of the quote, excerpted by Esack from Gadamer, discloses two more features. It certainly seems to affirm Esack's inclination towards individualistic subjectivism but also,

[64] Emphasis added

on scrutiny, discloses a tendency in Esack's work: to use material eclectically to suite a particular argument. Read in the context of his larger text, Esack appears to recruit the Gadamer notion of prejudice rather erroneously to endorse his subjectivism. We reflect on this from two angles. First, the paragraph from which Esack plucked the excerpt. It reads thus:

> It is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Thus we can formulate the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics as follows: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome? The Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth. (Gadamer, 2004, 278-280)

Where Esack's is offhandedly dismissive of complex concepts such as prejudice, subjectivity, and objectivity, we notice in Gadamer (and Cabral and Freire amongst others) a much more scrupulous, less cynical, approach to human fallibility and potential. Moreover, Gadamer doesn't dodge the epistemological question. He acknowledges the hazards of illegitimate prejudice and the role of critical reason in guarding against its excesses. He also entertains a complex notion of truth.

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Second, in the view of Gadamer's peers and patrons, such as Ricoeur and Madison, it should be stressed that, when Gadamer provocatively asserts that prejudices are integral to all understanding, he is, unlike Esack (see above citations), not condoning wilful bias or bigotry. 'The aim of Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice is to call into question the very notions of reason and knowledge that we have inherited from Cartesianism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment' (Madison, 1994, 250; Echeverria, 2006: 60 - 70).

In this rationalist view of things, it could be argued that, reason stands opposed to authority. What Gadamer objects to here is the quite arbitrary way in which Enlightenment rationalism

equates authority with blind obedience and domination. Instead, Gadamer seems to suggest that the Enlightenment ideal of Reason, as a 'faculty' enabling the individual to make contact with 'reality' unmediated by authority and tradition, is in fact an idol of modernity.

Truth, for Gadamer, is not a static but a dynamic concept. It is not merely an epistemological but also an existential concept, designating a possible mode of being in-the-world. Thus, he writes: 'The truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience…. The dialectic of experience has its own fulfilment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself' (Gadamer, 1990 [T & M], 319).

Contrary to the haphazard bent of Esack, Gadamer argues, much more cautiously, that it is the tyranny of hidden preunderstandings (see Bultmann quote pg. 2) that makes us deaf to the language that speaks to us in tradition. Esack does not engage this ambiguity at all. On the latter point of preunderstanding, Esack's brusque individualism may require serious harnessing. Esack seems to insinuate that simply by declaring his political proclivities, it entitles him to speak legitimately for the subaltern. Gadamer further recommends that interpreters should endeavour to bring all pre-understanding on board from the beginning. In so doing, they might be given full play and tested during the act of interpretation. For Gadamer and the subaltern, however, a distinction can be made between legitimate and illegitimate preunderstandings. (Gadamer, 2006, 267 – 320). Ironically, at this point, Gadamer seems to have more in common with Freire, Cabral and a dialogical subaltern methodology for knowledge production, while Esack remains preoccupied with his individualistic subjectivism.

Next, we consider Esack's usage of the word 'objectivity', applied here ambiguously[65] and in conjunction with 'neutrality'. It is unclear whether he means impartiality or objectivity in the

[65] Although what is objective is independent of anyone judging it, it does not follow that every objective fact is independent of any human judgement, since it might be a fact about a human judgement. It is an objective fact that I make the judgement that it is an objective fact that the Earth is the third planet from the Sun. The former fact, unlike the latter, is dependent on some human judgement – namely, mine about the Earth, but not on the

realist[66] sense. There is a distinction between objectivity and neutrality. As Collier (2004, 139-149) observes:

> Objectivity is not neutrality. Neutrality is confused with lack of bias. But unbiasedness is itself not the same as neutrality. People are often accused of bias because they have strong partisan opinions, but this is a misuse of the term. If there are good grounds for strong partisan opinions, they may be unbiased and objective. (2004, 139-149)

If there are no objective 'facts' or 'valid meanings', one could ask, are there any false or erroneous ones? What criteria would determine this? Esack's text and interviews very deliberately deflects such pertinent questions. Esack's arguments as cited favour a vague subjectivism. It is remarkable that, despite the absorbing perennial debate between relativism and absolutism or its other variation objectivism and subjectivism and the continuum of positions between, Esack opts to ignore the attendant complexities and nuances and simply doggedly champions a pedestrian relativism and an individualistic-subjectivist view.

Pluralism

This notion is critical to Esack's ILT (1997, 14, 17, 76, 77, 78, 179, 180), although he offers no theorisation thereof. He uses it in two senses. One, for his theopolitical project, as he explains, 'the Quran and Muhammad's example encourage co-operation and solidarity across 'belief' lines for justice and righteousness and that this solidarity is not based on a vague and undefined desire for peace and quiet' (1997, 180).

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human judgement that it is true. It is important to get this straight because it is sometimes mistakenly said that all objective facts are independent of all human judgements; each is independent of the judgement that it is true, but not of any judgements that it may be about. (Collier, 2004, 135)

[66] Realism, in the widest sense, the view that (a) there are real objects (usually the view is concerned with spatiotemporal objects), (b) they exist independently of our experience or our knowledge of them, and (c) they have properties and enter into relations independently of the concepts with which we understand them or of the language with which we describe them. Anti-realism is any view that rejects one or more of these three theses, though if (a) is rejected the rejection of (b) and (c) follows trivially. (If it merely denies the existence of material things, then its traditional name is 'idealism.') (Butchvarov, 1999, 562-3) (Camb. Dict. Phil.)

Briefly, regarding the latter, Esack's political intervention is no more than an *avant la lettre* and an ineffectual overstatement. Notwithstanding the inevitable sectarian and doctrinaire issues, that typify any multifarious mass social movement, the debates among the heterogeneous anti-apartheid resistance movement, during the period being contemplated, were much more complex, challenging and edifying. Religious difference, one amongst many, was never as singularly compelling, as Esack insinuates, except perhaps in very insular circles. The major tensions during the experience Esack reflects upon, were political and ideological as the previous chapter explains. There are no records of any major interreligious hostilities during the period under discussion, 1970s – 1990s.

Esack deploys the idea of pluralism as part of his relativist/subjectivist hermeneutic thinking (1997, 14, 17, 68, 77, 78), where any approach that entertains multiple/plural readings, regardless of epistemic or ethical verity, is extolled. As a foil to Esack's facile appropriation, of the notion of pluralism, we briefly consider some alternative usages of pluralism.

Eco, for instance, offers some suggestions in thinking about pluralism in hermeneutics. We should, he urges, note the key contrast between transmissive texts, or 'closed' texts, and productive texts, or 'open' texts. (1976, 136-9). A simple example of a 'closed' text comes from engineering. A manual of instruction about how to mend a defect or failure in a given brand of car cannot and should not be interpreted pluralistically.

'Open' texts can be described in Ricoeur's sense as the poetic and metaphoric, where: The poet is the one who breaks the bond between language and things on one level in order to express significant truths about the human condition on another. (Vanhoozer, 1990, 61)

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We can agree with Thiselton (2013, 14) that scriptural writings 'contain both types of texts.' Esack doesn't offer a general concept nor a literary or metaphysical taxonomy of the intra-textual nature of the Quran.

Additionally, where Esack insists on 'simple constructivism' and 'inevitable bias,' Eco proposes that 'indication' offers proof that the gulf between sign and referent— practically speaking —is not always absolute. Under certain conditions we can possess sufficient knowledge of context to fix semiosis:

> It is irrefutable that in the act of indication (when one says this and points his fingers toward a given object of the world), indices are in some way linked to an item of the extralinguistic or extrasemiosic world. (1994, 38). Though we may never know with absolute certainty, "the process of semiosis produces in the long run a socially shared notion of the thing that the community is engaged to take as if it were in itself true. (ibid. 41).

Unlike Esack's 'amorphous text' constrained by a 'selective partisan history', Eco seems to postulate an asymptotic model of semiosis with distinct implications for textual economy and coherence. It could be argued that economic considerations would matter little in a system of truly unlimited semiosis, but for Eco, "a text is a place where the irreducible polysemy of symbols is in fact reduced because in a text symbols are anchored to their context." (ibid. 21). Furthermore, "the text as a coherent whole" and "Any interpretation given of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed and must be rejected if it is challenged by another portion of the same text." (ibid. 59). Eco, also, as the notion of index suggests, subscribes to a variation of basic realist correspondence theory, where an appreciable correlation between intratextual ideas and extratextual reality helps to ascertain validity.

In contrast to Esack's generalization that 'Meaning is always tentative and partial' (1997, 13), Tejera (1997, 147) maintains that Eco rightly wants more respect for "the text as a system ruled by an internal coherence" (Eco, 1994, 151). Eco (ibid. 148) labors to show that

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> An open text is always a text, and a text can elicit infinite readings without allowing any possible reading. It is impossible to say what is the best interpretation of a text, but it is possible to say which ones are wrong. . ..Texts frequently say more than their authors intended to say, but less than what many incontinent (i.e. hermeticist or deconstructionist) readers would like them to say.

Where Esack seeks to curb infinite regress by recourse to defending bias and prejudice (1997, 78), for Eco, 'it is not true that everything goes.' (1992, 2002, 144), because 'the words brought by the author are a rather embarrassing bunch of material evidences that the reader cannot pass over in silence, or in noise.' (ibid. 24). What is required, he pragmatically maintains, is a 'minimal paradigm of acceptability' of an interpretation on the grounds of a consensus of the community which, he suggests, 'is not so dissimilar from Gadamer's idea of an interpretative tradition' (ibid. 144). In response to the inevitable question 'What kind of guarantee can a community provide?' he states (ibid. 144):

> I think it provides a factual guarantee. Our species managed to survive by making conjectures that proved to be statistically fruitful. Education consists in telling kids what kind of conjectures proved to be fruitful in the past. *Messer, Feuer, Scherer, Licht ist fur kleine Kinder nichtl* Do not play with fire and knives because it can hurt: it is true because many kids made the opposite conjecture and died. I think that the cultural community was - if not right, at least reasonable - in telling Leonardo da Vinci it was preposterous to jump from the top of a hill with a pair of flapping wings, because this hypothesis had already been tested by Icarus and proved to be doomed to failure.

Eco's arguments serve to deconstruct Esack's notion of hermeneutic pluralism and highlights the need to engage rather than, as Esack does, evade epistemological and ontological imperatives. It also highlights the irony that although Esack purportedly espouses a subaltern view, his hermeneutics appears decidedly individualistic.[67]

[67] Esack does not display sufficient confidence in the community/popular intelligence. Apart from one or two token acknowledgements, the 'people' do not feature in his discourse or hermeneutical praxis and conclusions.

Furthermore, we should ask, where does pluralistic logic end? With the benign 'intellectual activist'? Does she impose a 'preferred reading'? What is Esack's social ontology and anthropological epistemology? No word! How do we establish concordant thematization among the subaltern, given the plurality of meanings and readings? How is this criteria determined? Is the criteria 'For whom and in whose interests' pragmatically adequate? Is ILT merely pragmatic and expedient, as Esack's historiography and interviews indicate?

In opposing dogmatism, does ILT not, in the absence of clearly reasoned and empirically validated arguments, dogmatically (claiming people make truth) hold its own views to be incontrovertibly in 'the interests of the marginalised/oppressed' and therefore presume it is entitled to claim 'greater authenticity'. (1997, 86)? Esack certainly doesn't problematize this. Instead, unlike most hermeneuticists, and subaltern theorists he seems to think that exclaiming ones ineptitude or bias is sufficient to affirm epistemic credibility. Does revelation guide action or is it bent, per requirements of circumstances or individual whim, to accommodate some political or ideological agenda? Esack fails to grapple with the complexities and ironies of such questions. Instead, against the ethos of most hermeneutical traditions, he insists on the inevitability of 'wilful bias and bigotry', adding rather vaguely that 'All theological categories ... are always the product of ideology, history and seemingly apolitical reflections.' (1997, 85). As will be argued in the next section, this relativism serves to bolster the rhetoric of the political careerist more than the interests of the margins.

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Relativism

This dissertation argues that the notion of 'unqualified relativism' (or subjective relativism) suffuses, shapes and underpins most of Esack's pivotal concepts and implicit rationale. His political pluralism requires solidarity, 'across belief lines', relative to particular conditions and a particular set of social responses based on arbitrary consensus in the South African context.

His hermeneutic pluralism, in addition to being bias and partial, is always relative to and proliferated by 'baggage … experience … his/her subjectivity … preunderstanding' (1997, 10, 12, 51, 75) etc.

Esack utilises a curious ploy[68] to defend his unqualified relativism. Instead of interrogating the merits and claims of such relativism, he juxtaposes it to a 'false opposite'[69], absolutism (1997, 78), implying that because crude absolutists occupy an untenable epistemic position, all opposing positions are by default correct and/or meritorious.

Since Plato, it has been frequently argued that relativism about truth is incoherent because of the dubious status of the claim that 'truth is relative'; for if 'truth is relative' is itself true unconditionally, then there is at least one truth, which is not relative, and hence relativism is not true.

A vexing aspect of Esack's relativism emanates from his typical lack of conceptual integrity and failure to address nuance and functional classification. There are many ways of providing a purposeful classification of relativism, but most social philosophers would agree on the following taxonomy of three basic types, offered in schematic form here.

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One, subjectivists or subjective relativists maintain that the truth and falsity of judgements, the right and wrong of actions, and the acceptability of ethical and aesthetic evaluations, are all in a nontrivial sense dependent on the beliefs and opinions of individual thinkers and actors—they are expressions of the private psychological states of agents. Two, social relativism is the

[68] This is similar to, what Kukla (2000) calls, a switcheroo. One commits a switcheroo by starting with a hypothesis that's amenable to a range of interpretations, giving arguments that support a weak version, and thenceforth pretending that one of the stronger versions has been established. For example, one gives reasons for supposing that scientific facts are socially constructed and pretends that reasons have been given for supposing that there is no independent world.

[69] " All truth is relative" – a doctrine that is often dismissed as incoherent on the ground that any such statement of an absolute universally formulated relativist doctrine would have to be an exception to itself and would therefore be self- refuting.

claim that the truth and falsity of beliefs, the justification for knowledge-claims and the right or wrong of actions, depend on and are relative to prevailing social and cultural conditions. Three, conceptual relativism relativizes ontology, or our theory of what there is, to conceptual schemes, scientific paradigms, world views, semantic networks or frameworks.

Although, relativists since Protagoras have been accused of inconsistency and incoherence, this thesis resonates favourably with the view that relativism has merit if applied with due care. Relativism, for more than two thousand years, has shrugged off numerous attempts to refute it, and continues to tempt and lure. Part of the explanation for its perennial appeal and its periodic prominence lies in the fact, as Baghramian (2004) suggests, that 'it captures some essential insights, albeit in an exaggerated fashion'. A critical question, for us, to ask is, is an unqualified relativism the most apposite response to absolutist and monist conceptions of truth, goodness, and reason? Here, I once more recall the response of Baghramian (ibid.).

> …the cost of countering absolutism by relativising truth and goodness is too high. The price is either intellectual and moral paralysis—the inability to compare and evaluate what lies outside our immediate cultural and conceptual surroundings—or the very predicament that the relativist wishes to avoid: parochialism and ethnocentrism. Faced with differing cultural and conceptual perspectives, the relativist can do no more than either retreat from intellectual and social engagement with them—opt for quietism of the most extreme form—or accept that she can only use her purely local standards to judge others, and thus become indistinguishable from the provincial bigot she condemns. Neither option should satisfy her.

Esack's relativism is highly problematic for several reasons. There is a point at which pluralism and relativism create serious, practical and theoretical, contradictions as illustrated in the above passage. Secondly, he functions with an inchoate and undisciplined sense of these concepts. While operating mostly with the, widely discredited, subjectivist's notion, he, innocently applies it unreservedly and incongruently to the social and conceptual realms.

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For instance, in his hermeneutics, he defends the 'uniqueness' of the 'personal' and the consequent 'unlimited pluralism'. At the same time he rejects conservative and militant readings. Such narrow binary logic and languid theory succumbs to ideological simplification and, ironically, for a pluralist, precludes felicitous alternative models. As an illustration, according to semioticians, who accept social and conceptual relativism, it is only possible to study subjects in the field of semiotics through the encyclopaedic conventions of which they make use. The subjectivity assumes a semiotic identity on the basis of a paradox: it is not the origin of semiosis but rather its effect. The signification is not simply an individual act, because it takes place in the communicative processes and involves conventions shared by a multitude of subjects. 'The signification is a semiosic strategy that puts into play single subjects through categories that are not individual but social and cultural. Hence, semiotics recognizes subjects only in the cultural processes through the sign-function (Eco 1976: 314–317)' (Desogus, 2012, 505).

Or, consider the decolonial view articulated by Tamdgidi (2013, xviii) who cautions that when we say 'I think, the "I" that thinks is not a singular entity, as the Western "universalist" philosophy amid an individualistic culture proclaims, but is multiple.'

Esack's subjectivist relativism and inclination to privilege polemical imperatives above theoretical coherence tends to undermine his hermeneutic initiative and, as we will argue later, also the theopolitical vision for the margins he would like to articulate.

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Indeed, it should also be noted that Esack's attempt to escape the imperatives of epistemology[70] and the excesses of a pluralism that 'enjoy(s) the pleasures of difference without ever committing.. .' (1997, 78) by invoking the mantra 'For whom and in whose interests?' while emotive, is not aligned to the broad intellectual and ethical ethos of subaltern/decolonial activists. Decoloniality is a recent augmentation of subaltern revolutionary narratives. While it is a holistic approach, it emphasizes the epistemic challenges of legitimate alternatives to Euro-modernism.

Grosfoguel (2012, 101), expressing the decolonialist view, contends that:

> …neither a relativism of "everything goes" nor an epistemic populism where everything said by a "subalternized" subject is already equivalent to "critical thinking." Since not every "subalternized" subject or thinker from an "inferiorized" epistemology is already a critical thinker, "epistemic populism" should be refused. The success of the system is precisely to make those who are socially below to think epistemically like those who are socially above. So, we cannot use social location as the only criteria. Epistemic location is crucial here.

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The resolve with which subaltern/decolonial activists view epistemic issues is encapsulated in the following presentation. The term gnoseology is used by declonialists to emphasise the need to transcend and subsume, not disregard, the notion of epistemology. Alcoff explains that gnoseology is 'a more inclusive concept of knowledge that incorporates both doxa and episteme, both established and unconventional knowledges, both systematic and informal, and for Mignolo, both dominant and subjugated' (Alcoff, 2007, 94-95).

[70] Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justification; specifically, the study of (a) the defining features, (b) the substantive conditions or sources, and (c) the limits of knowledge and justification. (Camb. Dict. Phil., 1999, 273).

Gnoseology has no *a priori* commitments to placing the borders of knowledge in any given way, thus it can more readily incorporate an analysis of specific borders, as well as the presumptive preference for borders.

Alcoff again;

> Border thinking is a play on two concepts: the concept of thinking from the border and thinking about the border. The fact that gnosis is broader than knowledge, and gnoseology is broader than epistemology, also has the significant effect of altering the locus of enunciation or the type of enunciatory space from which knowing can be imagined to emerge. (Alcoff, 2007, 95-96).

There also seems to be a discernible friction between Esack's cavalier attitude and the solicitude expressed by Boff in the following quote, wherein he suggests that praxis requires ethical mediation that will

> enrich it with its specific determinations, especially in the form of natural law. . . . We may not embrace the ideology of orthopraxis or praxiology, dispensing ourselves from a thorough reflection on the ethical content of a given practice. . . . Faith measures, criticizes, stimulates, and orients social transformation, which in turn, expresses, realizes, and verifies the truth of faith and its values. (Boff, 1984, 203)

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Although there are several other aspects of relativism and epistemology that can be fruitfully explored, the following three observations are particularly pertinent to Esack's, relativism and its relation to his hermeneutics (and theopolitical thought).

One, Sokolowski (2000, 224) is of the view that: "It is regrettable that hermeneutics is often taken as a license for relativism, a use," he maintains, "that Gadamer would certainly dispute". Two, Triggs (2002, 9) cogently asserts that "repudiating a reason that can transcend history will only mean that we are trapped in our own historical period. We will share its assumptions and have no basis for questioning them." Three, 'Relativism is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its political implications.' Groff (2004, 1) If all beliefs about the world are equally valid, then no claims may be challenged on cognitive, or epistemic,

grounds. At best, relativism can therefore be expected to discourage critical analysis and exchange - for what is the point of attempts to persuade through argumentation, if all claims about the world are by definition equally valid?

On Theory

As noted earlier (see pg. 10 and footnotes), although Esack cites the views of many theorists, he seldom provides a cogent and cohesive theoretical argument. He does, however venture into the theoretical terrain occasionally.

So, seemingly as a bulwark to his subjectivist-relativism and to add impetus to his critique on 'people with a religious commitment (who) choose to believe that truth is exclusively an eternal and pre-existing reality beyond history. '[71] (1997, 10) he observes that (ibid.)

> Modernity has increased our awareness that the human mind is not a blank slate covered with facts entirely imported through cognitive and spiritual senses or through the authority of religio-intellectual traditions …. we are beginning to understand that, whatever else it may be, the essential awareness of one's mind is as "the tissues of contingent relations in language." (Aitken, 1991, 1)

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What does this mean? How do we make sense of such assertions? Is the mind a 'blank slate' partially covered (replace 'not entirely') with facts from 'a source'? Or is 'blank slate' an inappropriate analogy? Nevertheless, supposing the latter, Esack contends that the mind is not a 'blank slate'; its 'facts' are not 'entirely' derived from 'cognitive' and 'spiritual' sources nor 'the authority of 'religio-intellectual traditions'. It 'is as "tissues of contingent relations in language."'

He seems to allude to three aspects of mind, the content (its facts), source of latter (imported) and structure (not a blank slate; instead - tissues of contingent relations). How do these rather

[71] Another illustration of relying on a switcheroo (see pg. 18).

incongruous remarks illuminate Esack's approach? Of greater interest to Esack seems to be the 'other source'. What is the provenance and significance of this 'other source of facts'? Why is it important? Based on the polemic drift of Esack's text/thoughts, the 'other source' would seem to be the 'baggage of race class, gender and personal history' (1997, 10). His explanation suggests that these 'facts' are unrelated and preponderant to 'cognitive', 'spiritual' or traditional channels/sources. Its importance, to Esack, could be its probable correlation to and reinforcement of his subjectivist hermeneutics. However, such an account would seem to place Esack in an epistemic and basic logical predicament, since a rigid, or definitive, separation between 'baggage' and the other 'sources of facts' raises more questions, which he generally seems reluctant to engage. Questions of epistemology, the relation between language and 'reality', objective and subjective perceptions and constructions, while quietly acknowledged, are never addressed. Indeed, if 'meaning is inevitably bias and always partial', what is the nature and epistemic status of 'facts' derived from one, 'cognitive' and 'spiritual' sources and 'religio-intellectual traditions' and two, how do the two relate? The illogicality seems to have eluded Esack.

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Furthermore, if there are no 'objective facts', and the mind and human cognition is so elusive and contingent, how does Esack know so much with such confidence?

At this stage, his argument appears to be more of a tenuous justification for an inadvertent subjectivist epistemology?

Conclusion

The central dilemma in Esack's hermeneutics is epitomised by, on the one hand, his insistence on the Quran's universality and semantic independence (1997, 106), while on the other, he maintains that meanings can be or necessarily are 'legitimately contrived' (ibid, 85) by

subjectivist (politically partisan and individualistic) readings (ibid, 10). He offers no conscientious theoretical structure or conceptual substance to support this methodology. His attempts to justify his approach and the underlying postulates of his arguments, as this chapter demonstrates, where they exist, are untenable.

In defence of his subjectivists' pluralist hermeneutics, Esack repeatedly objects to the 'arbitrary limits set' by traditional scholars, insisting instead on the 'intrinsic pluralism of hermeneutics'. However, unlike Gadamer, Ricoeur, Eco, Bakhtin and the subaltern/decolonialist view, Esack sees no problem with 'arbitrary license' to interpret pluralistically provided you declare your bias. Thiselton (2013, 18) admonishes that 'if every text can be interpreted in an endlessly pluralistic way, how can this "form" or "transform" readers'. Esack certainly does not, or cannot, discount the ability of the text to 'form and transform'. His drawback is his indifference to the thought of providing a coherent conceptual schema for a more holistic reading.' Esack's determination to vindicate an unqualified reader-oriented, context circumscribed reading, without adequately accounting for text, language, tradition, epistemology and theory, where arbitrary bias determines the choice of reading/meaning, recalls Robbins', earlier mentioned, question, whether

'The interpreter seeks to engage in heteronomous responsibility rather than autonomous freedom, in intersubjective exploration rather than egological imposition'.

Other thematic considerations should be kept in mind, when regarding Esack's hermeneutics. One, the social and psychological effects of the exhilaration and exigencies of the struggle aginst apartheid. Two, the unmistakable impression Esack creates that his hermeneutics and theology seems subject/subordinate to, if not trammelled by, the way his political whim responds to the milieu he is negotiating.

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> Theology, for the marginalised, is the product of reflection which follows on praxis for liberation.' (1997, 85 - 86).
>
> For me, a fundamental question remains: For whom and in whose interests' does one pursue the hermeneutical task? That this is a political question is beyond doubt and may suggest a desire to use the text as 'pretext.' (1997, 73)

Esack emerges from and would like his audience to believe that his bias continues to favour the margins. However, his haphazard/eclectic Euromodernist intellectual schema (rhetoric) and ascendant personal social migration seems to have transfigured his praxis and calculus. The habitus of the political terrain (largely organizational, vanguardist[72], 'public spectacle'[73], practico-inert[74]) he traverses, portrays him as speaking for rather than organically with the subaltern. This locus together with the aporetic theoretically inchoate discourse would appear to have had an enfeebling effect on both the form and frame of his personally avowed and vaunted subaltern hermeneutic and theopolitical praxis.

This chapter has identified certain central concepts and aporia in Esack's theory of hermeneutics. The next chapter will investigate Esack's attempt, through the hermeneutical keys, to mediate and facilitate the process of establishing a Quranic schema and language for

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[72] The Zapatistas, far from coming to the people with a pre-made and canned program as is the case with most if not all political parties from right to left, set out from the Tojolabal Indigenous notion of "walking while asking questions." This "walking while asking questions" proposes an Other way of doing politics, very different from the "walking while preaching" of the Judeo-Christian, Western cosmology reproduced in equal measure by Marxists, conservatives, and liberals….the Zapatistas, with their "Tojolabal Marxism," begin an "Other Campaign" from the "rearguardism" that moves forward "asking questions and listening," instead of a "vanguardism" which "preaches and convinces." Grosfoguel (2012, 98-99)

[73] The 'politics of spectacle' intercepts socially and politically radical ideas and images, commodifies them, and safely incorporates them back within mainstream society. More broadly, it may refer to the appropriation or co-opting of any subversive works or ideas by mainstream media/discourse. See Debord (1967)

[74] It was Sartre who, in his Critique of Dialectical Reason, analyzed how active group-engagement becomes ossified in the practico-inert institutional structure. The key test of every radical emancipatory movement is, on the contrary, to what extent it transforms on a daily basis the practico-inert institutional practices which gain the upper hand once the fervor of the struggle is over and people return to business as usual. The success of a revolution should not be measured by the sublime awe of its ecstatic moments, but by the changes the big Event leaves at the level of the everyday, the day after the insurrection. (Zizek, 2009, 154)

responding to a ‘society characterised by injustice, division and exploitation’ (Esack, 1997: 82)

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Chapter 3

Hermeneutical keys towards a Theopolitical Chimera?

After deliberating on the nature and polemics of hermeneutics, Esack declares that

> I now want to move on to weave the Qur’anic rhetoric of liberation used during the 1980s into a more coherent theological theory and hermeneutic of religious pluralism

> for liberation. In doing so, I shall be focussing on the theological and political nature and implications of each of the following hermeneutical keys within the context of a society characterised by injustice, division and exploitation. (1997, 82)

This chapter undertakes to elucidate and investigate the nature and significance of Esack's chosen hermeneutical keys. The hermeneutical keys function to relate Esack's concept of the text (Quran) to his understanding of the context (SA liberation struggle). He deploys these hermeneutical keys to reinterpret and/or revitalise pivotal signifiers within the Quranic discourse. The reinterpreted signifiers then serve to animate the process of unfolding his theopolitical vision and praxis. The investigation of this chapter will be structured around the following questions: What are the keys? How do they originate? What do they mean/signify particularly in relation to the historical situation and discursive heritage of Muslims in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s? What are the functional and theoretical merits and demerits of the keys as articulated by Esack?

Provenance

As the opening quote opines, the 'keys' emerge, in part, at least, from the 'Quranic rhetoric of liberation' in South Africa. (1997, 82). As the struggle against apartheid intensified, daily conversations and challenges required people generally and activists in particular to provide answers to questions of identity, ideology, legitimacy, social, political, and theological objectives, adversaries and allies etc. Given the centrality of the Quran in the life of Muslims, their responses were, expectedly, filtered through its language and principles. Esack elaborates, 'An Islamic theology of liberation and its hermeneutical keys emerged from the Quranic reflections engaged in by Islamists in the many groups where young Muslims gathered to reflect on the relevance of the Quran and Sunnah to their lives and to the struggle against apartheid' (Esack, 1997, 83-84). In the face of austere, often apathetic, traditional authorities, these young Islamists had to retrieve alternative, historically and theologically credible,

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legitimation structures. In the process, they sought, 'support from the earliest forms of theological legitimation, the Quran and Sunnah, rather than to post-Muhammadan legal or theological tradition'. This enabled these young Islamists to develop a reading of the Quran and its legacy that allowed for the 'bypassing (of) clerics…free from the legal or "orthodox" meanings which tradition had accorded them. Impelled by conscience and indignation these Muslim social activists '…did not perceive any need to resort to traditional theology and it was widely felt that the categories developed by traditional scholarship … were irrelevant to, or insufficiently developed for, the context of both modernity and liberation' (ibid, 84).

The Hermeneutical Keys

Esack presents the keys as three pairs, each pair working as a principle and together, the six, operate as a hermeneutic device.

First pair

Taqwa (awareness of the presence of God) and *tawhid* (unity of God) comprise the first pair. According to Esack, these, 'are aimed at developing the moral and 'doctrinal' criteria with which to examine the other keys and the 'theological glasses' with which to read the Quran in general and, more specifically, the texts dealing with the religious other' (1997, 86). Furthermore, Esack emphasises that 'despite the seemingly theological nature of these two keys, they, like all theological precepts, are also formulated and understood within a specific historico-political context and are presented as such'.

Second pair

Al-nas (the people) and *Al-mustadafun fil-ard* (the marginalised), Esack counsels, 'define the location of our interpretative activity…interpreters also have the freedom to position

themselves differently in relation to any situation in order to arrive at a specific kind of interpretation' (1997, 87).

Final pair

Adl/qist (justice) and *jihad* (struggle), 'reflect the method and the ethos that produce and shape a contextual understanding of the word of God in an unjust society' (1997, 87).

Taqwa

Definition

Esack's usage of this key is developed as follows.

First, he contends that, in the Quranic sense, it may be defined as, 'Heeding the voice of one's conscience in the awareness that one is accountable to God. Its comprehensive sense of embracing both responsibility to God and human kind is evident' (1997, 87). Next, he asserts that, 'The Quran links *taqwa* to belief in God (10:63; 27:53; 41:18) and regards its attainment as one of the objectives of serving God' (2:21).

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Citing several Quranic excerpts, Esack then argues that what is significant is the way the Quran links *taqwa* to social interaction and concern for others, such as sharing (92:5; 7:152-3), fulfilling covenants (3:76; 7:52) and, especially, kindness (Q 3:172; 4:126; 5:93; 16:127). (Esack, 1997, 87) and the revelation's expressed need/hope 'for a community and individuals deeply imbued with *taqwa* who will carry on the prophet's task of transformation and liberation (Q 3:102-5; 125; 8:29)' (Esack, 1997, 87).

In the understanding, with which Esack identified, *taqwa* is one of the many potentially catalytic sacred reminders of humankind's vertical and horizontal responsibilities, the transcendent and the temporal. In the evolving theopolitical lexicon of the 80s in South Africa,

to have 'learnt *taqwa*', is to have become, in one instance, more 'aware of the plight of the oppressed' (Esack, 1997, 88).

Application and Functionality

'The notion of *taqwa,* arguably, represented the most formidable challenge to the progressive Islamist who sought to actualise his or her Islam in contemporary terms' (Esack, 1997, 88). In this section we examine how Esack and his associates articulated and rationalised the hermeneutical key *taqwa* in their theopolitical rhetoric.

We begin by considering one of his ideological syllogisms[75], which assumes the following form. First, he asserts that '*taqwa* … is the protective measurement against the … ideology which is alien to the Islamic worldview' (Esack, 1997, 88). Next, he affirms the latter by declaring that '*taqwa* ensures the Muslim walks in the grace of God' (Esack, 1997, 90). Then he insinuates that since, *Taqwa* is one of his hermeneutical keys, therefore, '*taqwa* ensures that [his] interpretation remains free from … theological obscurantism and political reaction' (Esack, 1997, 89).

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This ostensibly plausible syllogism, on closer inspection reveals serious lacuna. Firstly, how, in the absence of a pedagogical methodology and appropriate assessment schema[76], to cultivate and assess *taqwa,* do we ascertain the practical and theoretical validity of such a syllogistic claim? It recalls Mill's views on *a priori* fallacies. He cautioned against fallacious assumptions such as words have a magical power; that which is true of our ideas of things must be true of the things themselves; that whatever is, is rationally explicable; and that effects must resemble

[75] A syllogism has the form: all S is P, M is S, therefore M is P; an argument can be both deductively valid and perfectly absurd, as in 1. All telephone poles are elephants. 2. Sally is a telephone pole. 3. Therefore, Sally is an elephant. The conclusion is valid because it conforms to a correct syllogistic pattern -- in this case, affirmation of the antecedent -- but is ludicrous at the same time.

[76] Pedagogical methodology - process to nurture and fulfil certain psychological and cognitive aspirations. Assessment schema – method to measure program efficacy.

their causes. According to Mill, these are all errors, but we should go further and recognize a general *a-priorist* fallacy, which consists in trying to base knowledge of fundamental synthetic truths on anything other than systematically choreographed empirical evidence. It can be thus concluded that this syllogism is analytically[77] plausible, but lacking in substantive synthetic merit and hence performatively untenable as it stands.

Another issue, not properly explicated, pertains to the linguistic circularity of certain assertions. Esack advises that not only is *taqwa* an essential prerequisite for a 'proper reading' of the Quran, it is also a necessary 'quality towards which believers have to aspire, outside and beyond the immediate task of interpretation' (1997, 88). The question to be asked here is: at what point is the synergy between aspiration and *sine qua non* sufficiently balanced to allow for an optimum and felicitous hermeneutic?

Several problematic issues, from a liberation theology perspective, are also found to be embedded in the following arguments, structured as follows. First,

> The Quran often presents conjecture and personal whim as the two elements which distort its meaning. These are frequently contrasted with revelation, guidance, understanding and knowledge, and truth. Traditional theology has regularly accused theological and ideological adversaries of 'baseless speculation' and 'personal fancy' in order to dismiss their exegetical opinions. These accusations are invariably arbitrary and usually mask the ideological predilections of traditional theology. A Qur'anic hermeneutic of liberation, with *taqwa* as a key, ensures that interpretation remains free from both theological obscurantism and political reaction, even though they may be from the ranks of the oppressed and marginalised' (Esack, 1997, 88-89).

[77] **Analytic** judgment depends, for Kant, only on the meaning of the terms involved, such a judgment can always be established by determining that the meaning of the predicate term is included in the subject term. When a judgment cannot be determined in virtue of the meaning of the terms involved (and so is **synthetic**), it is an entirely familiar, and frequently a successful, procedure to seek to establish it a posteriori, i.e. by consulting experience. (Ward, 2006, 18)

What he seems to be suggesting here is that 1) the opposing arguments of 'traditional theology' are 'invariably arbitrary and … mask … ideological predilections', 2) extending the earlier fallacious syllogism, he declares that 'A Qur'anic hermeneutic of liberation, with *taqwa* as a key, ensures that interpretation remains free from both theological obscurantism and political reaction'. However, he has also repeatedly emphasised that 'all theological categories, no matter how authentic an air has been afforded them…, are always the product of ideology, history and seemingly [a]political reflections' (Esack, 1997, 85). Esack's text and general discourse makes no effort to explain or undo this inconsistency – this easy deduction based on the form; because theoretically A (*taqwa*), therefore practically B (free from contamination), but others, accommodationists for example, are unqualified to draw the same conclusion about their hermeneutic.

Apart from the '*taqwa*/ideology' contradiction, we are also urged to conclude that Esack and his political allies, by simply positing *taqwa* as a 'key', necessarily have a 'protective measurement against … Legitimating [all] ideology … alien to the Islamic worldview' (Esack, 1997, 88). This sounds like the positivist or absolutist arguments (free from theological and political contamination) he so vehemently opposes elsewhere (1997, 78) and also appears to undermine the 'pluralist' principles he espouses. Who decides on the limits of plurality and what to exclude? Why would Esack and his political allies be immune to egregious prejudice which he adamantly insists is inescapable and intrinsic to all human thought?

This also raises the question of 'privileged access to subaltern interests and aspirations?' We anatomise his line of reasoning here. He states, 'For me, a fundamental question remains: for whom and in whose interests' does one pursue the hermeneutical task?' (Esack, 1997, 73) and 'Theological obscurantism and political reaction … may be from the ranks of the oppressed and the marginalised' (Esack, 1997, 89). The questions pertinent here are; who determines the criteria for ascertaining the 'correct and/or appropriate reading'? Does Esack and his associates

have 'privileged access to subaltern interests and aspirations' that even transcends the self-knowledge of the oppressed; and does rhetoric automatically create or correspond to the desired reality?

Esack's position on the functionality of the hermeneutical key *taqwa* becomes even more tenuous when we consider his other pronouncements on it;

> That it facilitates an aesthetic and spiritual balance in the life of an engaged interpreter. A hermeneutic of liberation is forged in the midst of socio-political struggle, a struggle which confines its perspective to the immediate and the politically expedient. *Taqwa* forces the engaged interpreter to embark on a process of introspection, a process for which there is often neither the time nor the inclination.

Here, once more Esack's propositions and the structural contradictions have to be examined. In the first place, at a basic linguistic level, does a person's ability to know, speak or spell a word, quality, and/or value necessarily mean it is an attribute of that person? Most people can spell or pronounce the words courage and honesty, yet the respective embodied meanings and significance of these terms varies widely in efficacy and practice between individuals and contexts. Moreover, '*taqwa* ***forces*** the engaged interpreter to embark on ***a process*** of introspection, a process ***for which*** there is often ***neither the time nor the inclination'*** (Esack, 1997, 89). The notion, *taqwa*, **compels**, yet there is neither time nor **inclination**. The argument is seriously underdetermined[78] and suggestive of haphazard proclivity in Esack's work. There is the strong claim, in his own theory and tradition, that *taqwa*, particularly for the activist, has to be exercised despite the everyday exigencies. If Esack and his fellow activists had 'neither time nor inclination', how were they protected against 'theological obscurantism and political reaction'?

[78] At the heart of the underdetermination is the simple idea that the evidence available to us at a given time may be insufficient to determine what beliefs we should hold in response to it.

Second, Esack is a proponent of 'the inevitability of bias' (Esack, 1997, 16) and the view that 'people's lives are not shaped by text as much as it is shaped by context' (Esack, 1997, 44). With this as premise, how does a 'hermeneutic of liberation' operating in 'the immediate and politically expedient' transcend such contextual and partisan strictures?

Furthermore, he surmises (ibid, 89), despite the token presence of this key, *taqwa,* the 'Immediate political exigencies dominated quranic interpretation entirely and the struggle was deprived of the more profound and universal sense of history and broader vision that a comprehensive reading of a scripture such as the Quran offers.'

First, there is a tension between the view that the Quran offers an independent insight and the claim that readers 'construct meaning' which Esack does not clarify. Also, given all the severe above-mentioned contextual constraints and theoretical inconsistencies, how was the epistemic and ethical nature of the hermeneutic engendered and applied by activists developed? According to Esack, there was neither 1) 'time nor inclination', 2) 'political exigencies dominated interpretation' (whose interests and how?), and 3) praxis was delimited by 'the immediate and politically expedient' (1997, 89). Such inconsistencies and theoretical *aporia* does seem to suggest the presence of a more serious analytical and paradigmatic lacuna.

Esack operates, throughout the section on *taqwa*, with an 'anthropomorphic reified'[79] notion of the key. This, unexplained relationship between *taqwa* as a principle and political praxis,

[79] In general, reification refers to the act (or its result) of attributing to analytic or abstract concepts a material reality – it is a misplaced concreteness. Through reification people regard human relations, actions, and ideas as independent of themselves, sometimes governing them. The abstraction "society" is frequently reified into something that has the power to act. Society does not act – people do. Reification is an error of attribution. Reification occurs when people understand objectivations as if they were non-human or supra-human things and act "as if they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will." Reification indicates we have forgotten our "own authorship of the human world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, 89). I have added the idea of 'anthropomorphic' because of the insinuations of Esack's arguments explained in the text. The word anthropomorphic is added to emphasise the insinuation in Esack's usage. The word has independent agency to transform.

further undermines his argument which already appears to be fraught with inconsistencies and untenable propositions.

A third functionality of *taqwa*, as Esack asserts, 'is that it commits the engaged interpreter to a dialectical process of personal and socio-political transformation' (1997, 89). This appears as no more than another expression of the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' and a form of disguised political rhetoric. What does this process of transformation entail and envisage? Success, power, self-importance, spiritual evolution, socialism, neoliberalism, *ujamaa*[80]? Are 'liberationists' who read and try to make sense of the Quran any different, intellectually and morally from the theologians Esack refers as traditional? According to Esack's logic of 'ideologically and historically contaminated theological categories' (ibid, 85), this cannot be so, unless he and his political allies enjoy a privileged interpretative capacity these others do not have.

The situation is compounded when we include the following. First, 'While *taqwa* is also an essential source of support for the engaged interpreter ... there is still no guarantee of absolute meaning' (ibid, 90). The use of the expression 'absolute meaning' (ibid, 78) is in itself a curious choice, since he clearly denies the validity such a notion. However, he than states that '*Taqwa* ensures that the Muslim walks in the grace of God, a grace that allows him or her to remain on the path even while struggling to find it' (ibid, 90).

In addition to the AR fallacy, one has to ask how Esack can reconcile, at a basic semantic level, his very forceful concern about 'problems with any approach which cannot be subjected to rational, ethical and sociological scrutiny' (Esack, 1997, 75) with the statement that *taqwa* ensures you 'remain on the path even while struggling to find it' (Esack, 1997, 90). While paradox can be instructive, Esack's penchant to conflate levels of abstraction is unhelpful. For

[80] Ujamaa villages are intended to be socialist organizations created by the people, and governed by those who live and work in them. (Nyerere, 1967, Freedom and Development)

Esack there is no logical problem with being on a path which one has not yet found, but the paradoxes of intuitionist scholarship are unacceptable because they fail the test of rationality and sociological scrutiny (Esack, 1997: 75).

Tawhid

In unfolding a definition, Esack begins with the proposition that *Tawhid* is derived from the root which, generally, connotes, 'integrated unity', and, more specifically, in the Quran, 'the One whose Unity is unceasing and with whom there is none.' Further, he contends that *tawhid* has been correctly described as 'the foundation, the centre and the end of the entire (Islamic) tradition' (1997, 90-1). From the vantage point of his theopolitics, the idea of *tawhid* that impels Esack's 'revolutionary appreciation' thereof is given in the following quote (Esack, 1997, 91) from Shariati (Cited in Irfani, 1983, 36-7):

> *Tawhid* is a world view, living and meaningful, opposed to the avaricious tendency for hoarding and aims for eradicating the disease of money worship. It aims to efface the stigma of exploitation, consumerism and aristocracy … whenever the spirit of *tawhid* revives and its historical role is comprehended by a people, it re-embarks on its (uncompleted) mission for consciousness, justice, people's liberation and their development and growth.

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According to Esack (ibid), '*tawhid* as a way of looking at life was widely used by engaged interpreters in South Africa, both against the traditional separation between religion and politics and against apartheid… *tawhid* was increasingly viewed as both an ideological source and sacred frame of reference.'

The hermeneutical function of *tawhid* meant that 'The different approaches to the Quran – philosophical, spiritual, juristic or political – must be regarded as components of a single tapestry. All are required … to express the fullness of its message, for no single approach can adequately express it' (1997, 93). Furthermore, 'Each of these approaches, particularly the political one, (must) be mindful of the principle of *tawhid* lest the Quran becomes a mere tool

to argue for a specific view entirely divorced from its basic ethos. (MYM, 1978, & 1987; Call, 1988)' (Esack, 1997, 93).

In the context of the anti-apartheid struggle, the hermeneutical key *tawhid*, according to Esack (1997, 92), provides for two specifically germane applications. First, 'At an existential level, it means the rejection of the dualistic conception of human existence whereby a distinction is made between the secular and the spiritual, the sacred and the profane. Religion thus becomes a legitimate, even necessary, means with which to alleviate political injustice.' Second, 'At a socio-political level, *tawhid* is opposed to a society which sets up race as an alternative object of veneration and divides people along the lines of ethnicity. Such a division is regarded as tantamount to *shirk* (associating others with God), the antithesis of *tawhid'* (ibid.).

While Esack provides a neat 'analytical' taxonomy and syllogism of *tawhid*, his attempts to demonstrate its political value is curtailed by his omission to provide 'synthetic' substance. This suggests that his purported holism, as stipulated by this key, is more a feature of his political rhetoric than an expression of mature socially responsible theopolitical praxis and hermeneutic.

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To illustrate, we consider the following instance; 'Once belief in the *tawhid* of God, with is implications, is embedded in our consciousness, and we accept Allah's guidance as the true guidance, we have acquired Islamic subjectivity' (ibid, 93).

First, here the idea of truth implied is not congruent with the notion that 'people create truth'. It seems closer to the positivist notion which he vehemently rejects (1997, 78). Truth is a complex notion the ramifications of which Esack studiously avoids. Second, according to Esack the hermeneutic process is 'ideologically loaded' (1997, 75). If this is the case, how do we arrive at 'the true guidance'? Esack does not elucidate. Third, Esack is critical of what he regards as essentialist thinking (1997, 63), yet the passage, cited above, which he clearly

endorses, seems to imply that acquiring 'Islamic subjectivity' is an 'uncomplicated process in retrieving the essential'. Fourth, in the absence of explicating the meaning of and the experiential process required to produce 'belief … embedded in consciousness', there is also strong evidence of another example of 'anthropomorphic reification'

The People (*Al-Nas*) and The Marginalised *(Al Mustadafun fil-ard)*

The People (*al-Nas*)

Esack's approach here proceeds through the following questions.

1. What does the Quran say about the nature, purpose and responsibility of humanity while enduring/enjoying this earthly life?
2. What is the Quranic perspective on the socially marginalised? How do believers relate to this 'existential reality'
3. How are or can these notions be related to the South African liberation discourse of the 1970s – 1990s?

His undertaking commences with citing Quranic references. Esack contends that

> The divine trust was placed exclusively in humankind's hands, thereby lifting humankind beyond matter to the status of guardians of earthly life. The centrality of humankind is reflected in God's choice of them as His vicegerent on the earth, and by blowing of God's spirit into them at the time of their creation (15: 29; 32:9; 38:72) (1997, 94-95).

Moreover, Esack argues: 'God refers to humankind as His who are always in a state of journeying to him (23:60) and describes himself as 'Lord of the people' (114:1). On several occasions, the Quran identifies the interests of humankind with those of God' (1997, 95).

Having established a quranic view on the subject of humanity, Esack proceeds to attempt a historical and political rehabilitation of the expression 'the people'. He begins with the

following declaration, 'The 1980s saw the emergence of the notion of 'the people' as a significant concept of resistance in the popular imagination' (1997, 95). He then tries to posit a continuum between the unproblematised notions of the people in 1) the Quran, 2) as it features in his idea of ILT and 3) the Freedom Charter. It can be demonstrated that this argument is ideologically contrived and historically spurious. It will also become clear that many elements in his approach are ideologically consonant with the ascending neoliberal discourse and praxis of the period.

Firstly, it can be demonstrated that 'the people' was one of the key signifiers of the political and ideological contestations of the period. However, as is his wont, Esack broaches the context/period with its swirling political semantics and pragmatics in a rather fragmented untheorized manner. From both critical discourse (Laclau, 2005, 113) and socio-rhetoric (Van Eck, 2001; Robbins, 2005) analyses viewpoints, the meaning and hegemony of a signifier is formed by the way it is articulated to other elements in the discursive field. Meaning is virtually never merely a consequence of a neutral natural isolated signifier as Esack's narrative, ironically at this point, insinuates!

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A Brief Historical and Theoretical Excursion

In the context of South African liberation struggle during the 1980s-90s, it can be reasonably asserted that the expression 'the people' functioned as a nodal point. Nodal points organise the discourse around a central privileged signifier or reference point – '*points de caption'* or 'quilting points' as Lacan (1977) termed them. They bind together a particular system of meanings or 'chain of signification', assigning meanings to other signifiers within that discourse. For instance, the word black assumes differential semantic inflections depending on whether it is articulated to a semiotic *gestalt* of resistance or prejudice. In the first sense, it

evokes images and connotes meanings of assertiveness, resurgence, and subversion. In the second sense, it evokes images and connotes meanings of inferiority, incompetence, and incompleteness.

In the South African experience, the expression 'the people' was ideologically positioned to play the role of a nodal point which quilted several discourses and also facilitated the ascendency and hegemony of a neo-liberal nationalist articulation[81]. When discourses become hegemonic, the social practices they inform can appear so natural that members of a society fail to see them as the result of political hegemonic contestation. Discourses then reach the level of 'common sense' (doxa Bourdieu et al footnote), in that their genealogy and inherent contingency are obscured. As Laclau puts it 'the hegemony of a particular social sector depends for its success on presenting its own aims as those realizing the universal aims of the community' (Laclau, 2000, 50). Notwithstanding, or should it instead be because of, the polysemy of expressions like 'the people' or 'the marginalised', the neo-liberal nationalist semiotic *gestalt* (emblematic of the ANC) was able to subsume and neutralise several other (socialist, pan-Africanist, African communalist, liberal mixed economy) articulations.

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The interwoven tapestry of resistance narratives including progressive feminism, socialism and responsible participatory citizenship were re-framed through the overarching metaphor of 'sovereign nationalism' and imbued with an individualistic Darwinist free-market social logic.

The expression 'the people' was widely articulated and equated to a welter of other terms and political orientations. There were several cognate terms such as black, oppressed, proletariat,

[81] It can be argued that the ANC was able to use the "language of 'the people', to renovate the power bloc…" It "brings into existence a new 'historic bloc' between certain sections of the dominant and dominated classes." Its discourse offered a "rich mix", combining long-standing contested themes, of "nation, family, duty, authority, standards, and traditionalism" with a revived neoliberalism – self-interest, competitive individualism, free market logic and 'authoritarian populist statism'.

working class, marginalised, underclass, downtrodden, and disenfranchised. In many cases, each of these terms were key signifiers of the many extant ideological orientations, of the time, which ranged from liberal, Pan-Africanist, black consciousness, socialist, through liberation theology, communist to non-racial market oriented nationalism. These in turn were associated with forms of organization and resistance. For instance organizationally there were centralist structures and the more organic participatory forms. Resistance strategies ranged from militarist, workerist, issue-specific campaigns, integrated cultural-hegemonic repertoires through to differently motivated and expressed forms of mass action.

In the historical context of the South African Liberation struggle, Esack's usage of the term people, unarticulated to a distinct discursive and ideological discipline is problematic and susceptible to an authoritarian populist articulation. It should be noted as will be illustrated that it formed an integral part of the ANC's ideological hegemonic campaign. Moreover, it seems that Esack, inadvertently, through such activities, was advancing the hegemonic project of the neo-liberal solution alluded to earlier, where 'the hegemony of a particular social sector depends for its success on presenting its own aims as those realizing the universal aims of the community' (Laclau, 2000, 50). Esack's populist rhetoric and increasing reliance on floating signifiers is epitomised by his unqualified association with the symbolism of the Freedom Charter (FC). Its most evocative and resounding pledge is its first clause; the people shall govern. The link with Esack's key is evident, however, it should be noted that the history of the FC pulsates with contestation, contradiction, compromise and capitulation. Historians, ranging from avowed socialists, through political pragmatists and liberals (Giliomee, Saul, Bond, Marais, Thompson, Posel) agree that the FC, a potent symbol, reflected the existential anguish of blacks under apartheid. It was a historic compromise between various ideological currents of the day in which the dominant motifs were non-racialism and an ambiguous ideation of the future socioeconomic structure. At best it was welfarist. Indeed, it eventually succumbed

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to a neoliberal modality (Terreblanch, Kasrils). The FC was emphatic about guaranteeing what 'disinterested' historians have described as basic liberal democratic rights. The point here being that a one-dimensional political symbolism, Esack seems prone to, does not faithfully represent or capture the complex issues and ideas and intense hegemonic struggle engendered and evoked by the historical expression 'the people' in the South African liberation struggle.

It is thus clear, that Critical Discourse Analysis, Socio-Rhetoric Analysis and a broad perspectival spectrum of South African historiography does not support Esack's reading and appropriation of the signifier 'the people'.

Before concluding his section on 'the people', Esack voices his concern about 'two hermeneutical implications' and two attendant theological questions. First, on the hermeneutic implications, he observes (1997, 96) that 'It becomes essential that the Quran be interpreted in a manner which gives particular support to the interest of people as a whole or which favours the interests of the majority among them, rather than that of a small minority.' And, that 'Interpretation must be shaped by the experiences and aspirations of humankind as distinct from, and often opposed to, that of a privileged minority among them' (ibid.).

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It is unclear from a reading of Esack's political analysis how one is to interpret 'interest of people as a whole' or the 'interests of the majority among them'? We have just demonstrated that the South African political landscape, at the time of Esack's reflections, was fraught with contrasting repertoires of contention, a nuanced multiplicity of collective political identities, and numerous discursive tendencies. The questions that would appear to challenge Esack's atheoretical posturing are, given the multi-discursive and complex socio-rhetoric landscape of South Africa at the time, 1) who will establish the 'interests of the majority' and how? 2) What is the nature of the relationship between subjective aspirations and 'objective' interests? This is particularly pertinent since Esack argues elsewhere, that his position is a 'conscious denial

of objectivity' (1997, 103) and, 'In its place is offered a subjectivity which enables one to walk in the path of the prophets' (ibid.). This kind of easy ideological argumentation is not helpful? It is more a license for a 'free-for-all' thinking which he also seems to decry? In denying 'objectivity', is he referring to epistemic, moral, systemic, or all forms thereof? Is denial of objectivity an existential 'procept'[82] and a sufficient precondition which enables one to 'walk in the paths of prophets'? It would seem that in this instance, his subjective rhetorical zeal has eclipsed the rationality he elsewhere applauds. Finally, on what basis is the phenomenon of 'the majority' determined?

Regarding the theological questions, Esack (1997, 96) advises that 'The notion of humankind as a hermeneutical key poses two theological problems which require a considered response; the first problem relates to the value of people as a measurement of truth and the second relates to the question of authenticity.' Responding to the first question, he (ibid. 97) maintains that

> Humankind as a hermeneutical key is located and affirmed within the framework of *tawhid* and grounded in the absolute. Thus one may argue that while the *humanum* is a criterion of truth, it is not an autonomous *humanum* as an absolute criterion that is being advocated, but one drawing its substance from *tawhid*. Furthermore, humankind is one hermeneutical principle among others and this serves to balance its role in the overall interpretative process.

What we can observe here is a circularity of arguments and the fallacy of *petitio principii* (begging the question). Before elaborating upon the latter, we consider a basic linguistic contradiction in the above quote. Esack states that 'humankind as a hermeneutical key is located and affirmed within the framework of *tawhid* and grounded in the absolute.' He then says that 'while the ***humanum*** is a criterion of truth … it is not an absolute criterion … but one

[82] A procept is anything that is a property of the individual, that happens to him, that affects or characterizes him in any way at all, so long as it relates to him as a proceiver (as an identifiable and cumulative individual) and not as a mere entity in the cosmic maelstrom (Justus Buchler, 1951).

drawing its substance from *tawhid*.' This kind of linguistic inconsistency is unhelpful. Esack selectively applies the criterion of rationality (1997, 75). Moreover, recall, on the subject of *tawhid,* that Esack was unable to provide a substantive and functional definition or procept of this 'key'. Hence, the fallacy of circularity. It is unclear what meaning or argument Esack proposes, as his premises are undefined. One could also ask, how 'balance' is achieved when the cognate notions of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' are emphatically rejected (ibid, 97).

Regarding the question of authenticity Esack (1997, 97) responds thus.

> A legitimate concern of all those committed to the sacredness of the text is what may be described as 'hermeneutical promiscuity', where anyone is allowed to get into bed with the text….what guarantees does one have that the sacredness of the text will not give way to an exegetical free-for-all where every text is stripped entirely of its religious legitimacy?

His argument (1997, 97) has the following form.

1. The very idea of quranic hermeneutics challenges traditional concepts.
2. Irrespective of the piety, awe and reverence … [adopted] by traditional scholarship, the text has always been something about which scholars have differed.
3. In the context of injustice, if concepts such as the sacredness and theological legitimacy of a text are not related to the struggle for justice, then these concepts are themselves little more than additional weapons in the ideological arsenal of injustice.
4. As for the problem of 'hermeneutical promiscuity' … this task is embarked upon by Muslims who have chosen to be committed to the text.

Esack (ibid.), thereafter, without clearly explaining his reasoning, concludes that 'Their interpretation is not the wild speculation of individuals but a goal-oriented communal search for meaning.' And, that (1997, 97), 'The goals of this interpreting community come from the depths of their humanity and are affirmed in the text beyond doubt.'

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Proposition 1 can be accepted on the basis of Kuhn's, almost apodictic, generally accepted, position that there is an 'essential tension' between tradition, adaptation and innovation. **Proposition 2** remains vague, because Esack does not qualify the statement 'always … scholars have differed'. Was it within certain mutually observed parameters? Were the differences nuanced? Were they profoundly contradictory? Did these differences result in paradigm changes, reconfiguration or more? Were the differences based on incommensurable criteria? Esack's approach here is simplistic. An analysis of greater theoretical and historical substance would have been more supportive of his argument. **Proposition 3** is also problematic. Who determines the nature of the relationship between 'concepts' and 'the struggle for justice'? Based simply on a pluralist logic, there ought to be several ways in which this relationship can be formed and performed. **Proposition 4** is equally vacuous. Are other scholars, who might be traditionalists or whose views differ from Esack's, not capable of being 'committed to the text'? Such an assumption is presumptuous.

Furthermore, does being 'goal-oriented' exempt you from prejudice or 'wild speculation' whether as individual or group? This 'favoured community', according to Esack, proceed from the 'depths of their humanity'. Where do other interpretative communities and individuals proceed from? Esack appears to be dismissive of the views of those who differ from him. Esack's political rhetoric seems to constrain his ability to provide coherent answers to the pertinent questions he poses regarding the relationship between hermeneutics and the metaphysical and theological conscience.

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The Marginalised *(al-Mustadafun fil-ard)*

Esack (1997, 97) begins this section with the statement that 'The Quran singles out a particular section of humankind, the marginalised, and makes a conscious and deliberate option for them

against neutrality and objectivity, on the one hand, and the powerful and the oppressors, on the other.'

Esack counsels that although the Quran utilises several terms (such as *aradhil, fuqara,* and *masakin*) to describe the lower and impoverished classes of society, *mustadafun* has a distinctive semantic quality and political connotation 'The major difference in the term *mustadafun* is that someone else is responsible for that condition. One can only be *mustadaf* as a consequence of the behaviour or policies of the arrogant and powerful' (ibid. 98).

He then reiterates and reinforces what he describes as the Quran's 'preferential option for the *mustadafun'*. In the chapter *al-Qasas* (1997, 98-100) a preferential option for the *mustadafun* is made in unambiguous terms, despite their rejection of God. This preferential option for the oppressed is reflected in

1. The particularised identification of God himself with the oppressed.
2. The lifestyles and methodology of all the Abrahamic prophets.
3. The Quranic denunciation of the powerful and the accumulation of wealth.
4. The Quran's message of liberation to women and slaves.

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Furthermore, a number of verses link faith and religion with a humanism and a sense of socio-economic justice. A denial of these is linked with a rejection of justice, compassion and sharing (107: 1-3; 104; 22:45) [1997, 99].

Esack attempts to further strengthen his position by enlisting and deploying the following observations (1997, 99-103).

> According to the Quran virtually all prophets, including Muhammad, came from peasant or working-class backgrounds.

> Opposition (presumably to the prophet's message) invariably came from the ruling and dominant classes … the *mala* (rulers or aristocracy) (11:27. 38; 23:24, 33; 26:34), *mutrafun* (ostentatious) (33:34; 43:23) and the *mustakbirun* (arrogant) (16: 22; 23:67; 31:7)
>
> Al-Tabari describes Muhammad's followers as "the weak, the destitute, young men and women. However, of the elderly and socially distinguished none [initially] followed him."
>
> The insurrectionary and preferential option for the *mustadafun* is particularly evident from the way of life of Muhammad and his early followers in Mecca.
>
> He was instructed by the Quran to remain committed to the marginalised despite the short-term financial and economic advantages for Islam which would have followed the subsequent entry into Islam of the wealthy and the powerful had he abandoned them (80: 5-10).

Esack (1997, 103) than concludes that 'The need for the interpreter both to place himself or herself among the marginalised and within their struggles, as well as to interpret the text from the underside of history, is based on the notion of the divine and prophetic option for the oppressed.'

South African Muslim liberationists, according to Esack, 'thus argued that a similar bias must be exercised' (ibid, 103), and that this should entail 'a conscious denial of objectivity' and 'in its place a subjectivity which enables one to walk in the path of the prophets.'

Esack and his associates' easy and unabashed 'denial of objectivity' and 'option against neutrality' provokes several vexing questions. First, what happens when there are differences between and amongst the oppressed themselves? It is evident that the marginalised communities are heterogeneous and embody a wide array of religious, cultural, and ideological variations. Who will select the arbiter? How will the arbiter rule? One recalls Mamdani's (2002, 233) chilling testament that 'The irony is that ... the perpetrators of the genocide saw themselves as the true victims of an ongoing political drama, victims of yesterday who may yet

be victims again. That moral certainty explains the easy transition from yesterday's victims to killers the morning after.'

The menace of political and moral expedience also appears embryonic in Esack's (1997, 73) admission that 'For me, a fundamental question remains: for whom and in whose interests' does one pursue the hermeneutical task? That this is a political question is beyond doubt and may suggest a desire to *use the text as 'pretext'.'* (emphasis added)

The approach adopted by Esack does 1) certainly locate him, though not necessarily 'among the marginalised and within their struggles' (as demonstrated) and 2) could certainly contribute to, or perhaps, due to its flailing conceptual and performative inconsistencies, even confound, the discourse on liberation. While one can applaud his predilection towards the marginalised, Esack's untroubled selectivity and subjectivity together with the easy claim ('walk in the path of the prophets') is indicative more of demagoguery than conscientious and thoughtful activism. It also underscores a recurring motif; Esack's tendency to aporia and to oversimplify complex issues.

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Justice *(Adl/Qist)*

In this part, on the method and ethos of his hermeneutics, Esack commences by introducing the Quranic view and concept of justice.

> And God has created the heavens and the earth in truth; and so that every person may be justly compensated for what he/she had earned and none be wronged. (Q, 45:22)
>
> He has set up the balance of justice in order that you may not transgress the measure. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. (Q, 55:1-10)

Esack explains that 'These verses place humankind and the task of doing justice within the context of their responsibility to the Creator, on the one hand, and the order which runs through the cosmos, on the other' (1997, 104).

To elaborate his view he enrols the opinions of scholars such as 14th Century Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah who postulated that 'God has sent His Messengers and revealed His Books so that people may establish *qist*, upon which the heavens and the earth stand. And when the signs of justice appear in any manner, then that is a reflection of the shariah and the religion of God' (ibid.). For Esack the Quran is concerned with all forms of injustice, but particularly that which is systemic 'Injustice is a deviation from the natural order and … regarded as a disturbance in 'the balance'' (ibid, 104).

Another excerpt from the Quran that was, according to Esack, 'very significant in South African Islamic liberatory discourse' (ibid, 104) is 'Indeed we have sent our apostles with clear proof; and through them we have bestowed revelation and the balance so that humankind may behave with *qist*; and we have provided you with iron, in which there is awesome power as well as other benefits for humankind' (Q, 57:25)

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Thus, Esack asserts, that 'The Quran … repeatedly contrasts justice with oppression and imposes on its followers the obligation to destroy the latter and establish the former' (ibid, 105). The Quran, and particularly its pronouncements on justice, offered the Muslim liberationist in South Africa ample textual justification and inspiration to 'Fight them on until there is no more tumult and oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God' (Q, 2: 193) (ibid, 105). At this point, Esack suddenly urges caution. In the first instance, he says that 'The crying need of South African people for socio-economic justice has often resulted in a rather **myopic view** of the **Quranic** meaning of **justice**' (ibid, 105).

Esack maintains that because of the historically distinctive physiognomy of racial capitalism in South Africa, the terms *adl* and *qist* were often invoked in a very restricted sense.

> Justice employed in such a context thus seldom embraced, for example, the socio-religious liberation of women. Similarly, the idea of *zulm al-nafs* (to wrong oneself), an important dimension of the Quranic understanding of injustice, was never invoked in Muslim liberation rhetoric, nor did it receive any coverage in the speeches or written works that emanated in the period under discussion. (ibid.)

Furthermore, he continues, that although the Call and the MYM 'Acknowledged the need to redress the unbalanced appreciation of *adl* and *qist* … they failed to do much in practical terms' (ibid 105-6).

Secondly, with particular reference to the hermeneutical enterprise, Esack (1997, 106) astonishingly, despite his tame capitulation to Reception Hermeneutics, admonishes that 'The uncritical imposition of the requirements of the struggle and the ideas coming therefrom on to the text is to deprive the struggle of the visionary insights that a scripture such as the Quran is capable of supplying.'

After all the 'relativist' and 'situation-bound constructivist' sermons, this gesture seems incongruent. However, to help us find an answer, Esack immediately, thereafter, insists that (1997, 106)

> A1. The Quran offers itself as an inspiration and guide for comprehensive insurrection against an unjust status quo.
>
> A2. The Quran, by its own admission, is compelled to be an ideological tool for comprehensive insurrection against oppression.

The implications of this reading or 'scriptural injunction', according to Esack (1997, 106), are:

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B1. One **cannot justify** adopting an **objective** approach to the Quran while one is surrounded by oppression … without searching for ways in which the Quran can be used against it.

B2. **Neutrality or objectivity** in such a context is, in fact, **a sin** which excludes you from the ranks of those imbued with *taqwa*.

B3. The approach to the **Quran** as a **tool** for insurrection presupposes all the ideological and theological commitments as well as an affinity to the values … concretised **in** a **struggle** with **humankind** and the oppressed to **create** an order based on ***tawhid*** and ***taqwa***.

Given that

1. Esack is an enthusiastic protagonist of RH, which he explains 'does not try to recover an author's elusive intention' (1997, 63)
2. His argument that the Quran 'is compelled to be an ideological tool' and 'the inevitability of bias' (1997, 16) and that
3. Neutrality or objectivity is a sin (B2 above)

The question can and must be asked, how can 'the visionary insights that a scripture such as the Quran is capable of supplying,' (1997, 106) survive against the vociferous ideologically motivated subjective and partisan clamour of the liberationist? Moreover, while Esack acknowledges and bemoans the usage of 'a rather myopic view of justice' he seems remarkably oblivious to the implications of his grossly simplified essentialist usage of the expression 'the people/oppressed'. His usage suggests that 'the oppressed' signifies an 'undifferentiated mass' which liberationists, with their biased subjectivity and 'immunised activism' ([who] walk the paths of prophets), are easily able to represent and liberate.

Jihad (Praxis as a path to Understanding)

Esack (1997, 106-7) unfolds this key thus.

> Jihad literally means 'to struggle', 'to exert', 'to spend energy or wealth'. In the Quran, it is frequently followed by the expressions 'in the path of God', and 'with your wealth and selves'. The term jihad was always understood by Muslims to embrace a broader struggle to transform both oneself and society. The Quran itself uses the word in its various meanings ranging from warfare (4:90; 25:52; 9:41) to contemplative spiritual struggle (22:78; 29:6) and even exhortation (29:8; 31:15; 66:9).

His own particular usage is given as follows 'I have rendered jihad as 'struggle and praxis'' (ibid, 107).

The preferred definition of jihad in the South African Islamic liberatory discourse, which breaks with the traditional juristic understanding, is reflected in the following quotes offered by Esack (ibid, 107).

> Jihad is the Islamic paradigm of the liberation struggle … striving for truth and justice (Qibla, n.d.)
>
> The struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa is a sacred one. Any Muslim who abandons the struggle in South Africa, abandons Islam. (Call of Islam, 1985, 1)
>
> The purpose of jihad is to … destroy and eradicate injustice and not to replace one unjust system with another …. (Qibla, n.d.)

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Moreover, contrary to global popular stereotypical misrepresentation, in the South African anti-apartheid struggle, 'The centrality of justice as the objective of jihad, rather than the establishment of Islam as a religious system, was common in virtually all the public pronouncements of the Islamists' (ibid, 107).

How then, does this notion of jihad function as a hermeneutical key for Esack? First, Esack advises us that 'Praxis as a source of knowledge has always been recognized in Islamic scholarship. The Quran lays great emphasis on orthopraxis and strongly suggests that virtuous deeds and jihad are also ways of understanding and knowing' (ibid, 107).

What is this 'praxis'? Esack cites Chopp (1989, 137) who offers a rather rambling and vague description of 'praxis' as '…conscious action undertaken by a human community that has the

responsibility for its own political determination … based on the realization that humans make history.'

What is the nature of this action? Is inaction also not a form of 'conscious action undertaken'? Do they vote as in a representational system? Do they take up arms? Do they transgress the customary and conventional to ventilate their concerns? Do they challenge the incumbents, the system and/or the epistemic and ethical foundations of the dominant paradigm? What methodology or *adab* distinguishes this process? In the absence of further elaboration, the quote is unhelpful. The last phrase offers no more than a trite tautology. Elsewhere, however, Esack contends that 'By praxis we mean doing and reflecting. (ibid, 84) Dogma may precede praxis, but not in the case of a theology that is committed to liberation' (ibid, 85).

The first statement suggests a simultaneous process, although without elucidation. The second suggests a sequential process, again unqualified. What about the idea that 'human beings enter consciousness as prior denizens of a world of symbols and myth' (Wallace, 1995, 5)? Also, is dogma the appropriate term to use here? How does dogma relate to cultural or bio-political proclivity? Do the conditions of language, a moral and epistemic model of the world, acculturation, and a sense of cause-and-effect, not precede or delimit all forms of 'praxis' as constructivism (to which Esack clearly subscribes) requires? If 'doing and reflecting' is a simultaneous process, why should dogma precede praxis? Is Esack implying that only those who reflect after praxis are able to generate 'liberatory theology'? Is he describing a methodological technique the outcome of which is a 'special form of knowing'? Is LT a consequence of existential conditions? Is it an upshot of ideology? How does this epistemic process differ from other modes of knowing?

Eventually Esack tells us that 'Jihad, as praxis serving as a hermeneutical key, assumes that human life is essentially practical; theology follows' (ibid, 108). So what is praxis? This key

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remains enmeshed in contradiction. After all, Esack has decided that 'human life is essentially practical'[83], even though he earlier accedes that praxis is 'doing and reflecting'. Nonetheless, at this point, Esack's aporetic attempts to rescue the key by means of the following sleight of hand 'Our jihad will be informed by the Quran and our faith as much as our understanding of these will be informed by our jihad' (Call of Islam, 1985) (Esack, 1997, 108). Is this a clarification or stating the obvious?

For Esack and his activist allies another question also arose 'Not whether our understandings and approaches to Quranic concepts should be shaped by the liberation struggle, but whether they could be shaped entirely by a particular political tendency within it?' (ibid, 108). In their uncertainty they chose a response, in theory, at least, which promoted greater emphasis on 'quranic reflection, internal moral exhortation and prayer' (ibid, 109). This, however, he laments, was 'wholly inadequate against the underlying ideological messages' (ibid, 109). This last citation, casts a light of dubiousness over Esack's notion and efficacy of the keys.

Notwithstanding their verbalised religio-ideological reservations and rhetoric, Esack and his allies were, in practice, unassailably moored to the UDF (ibid, 108) (also see ch. 2). In an attempt to retain a subaltern façade, Esack describes the UDF, rather subjectively and spuriously, as an 'organization of the people'. The social efficacy and complex historical phenomenology of the UDF is seriously misrepresented by such populist rhetoric. Many academic and activist historians (Saul, 2005, 2014; Bond, 2000, 2004, 2014; Kasrils, 2013; Terreblanch, 2002, 2012) have demonstrated that this was the kind of political rhetoric that helped to bolster the ANC-led hegemony of the neo-liberal solution in South Africa. Perceiving himself to be caught between a 'religious accomodmationist tradition' and an erratic capricious

[83] Esack's inclination to reductionism and oversimplification is again evident. Is meditation or dialogue part of the 'practical' or not? The vibrant and searching conversations of the SA liberatory struggle (WIP, Social Review, Grassroots a few among countless publications which recorded this) which was encompassing and the ruminations of Cabral or Freire amongst others who remain integral to subaltern liberatory pedagogy and archive would (as clearly referenced earlier) look askance at such facile formulations of life, struggle and praxis.

populism, Esack sought sanctuary in rhetorical gestures one of which he describes as heuristics (Esack, 1997, 108) 'Those who claimed to have access to certainties were … paralysed into inaction … those who were committed to tentativeness were actually fully engaged' (ibid, 109).

A partisan gloss is evident here. Practically, nobody claimed certainty (for believers it would be blasphemous, for critical thinkers woefully antithetic) and few were paralysed into inaction. However, on the continuum of resistance discourses some were glib and inclined to demagoguery and others were conscientious and conscionable and not bewitched by the spell of 'authoritarian populism'. For many, engaged in the struggle at the time, such a glib either/or populist argument would be considered ideologically disingenuous and historically spurious.

The education struggle in South Africa – which intersected with several allied conversations on health, gender, economics, politics, environment - engendered many dynamic concepts and alternative pedagogies and praxis resonating with the works of Freire, Bergson, Gintis, Illich, Fanon, Cabral, Montessori, Postman and others[84]. Quaintly, when Esack refers to the heuristic approach he seems to mean no more than trial-and-error learning (ibid, 108). He doesn't problematize nor conceptualise the actual methodologies and alternative pedagogies with which activists of the time were grappling.

Based on Esack's own hesitancy and capitulation to the populist repertoire, the 'praxis circles' he alludes to could easily have been mainly veiled centres for the dissemination of partisan political ideology.

Conclusion

[84] Problematizing the Dominant Cultural-Epistemic framework through concepts such as the Hidden Curriculum, Critical Pedagogy for holistic emancipatory transformation, De-schooling society, knowledge and power and questions, based on Bateson's three levels of learning, such as

1. Are we doing the right thing?
2. Are we doing things right?
3. Who decides what is right?

Esack's attempt to 'Weave the quranic rhetoric of liberation used during the 1980s into a more coherent theological theory and hermeneutic of religious pluralism for liberation' (ibid, 82) is clearly, in view of the foregoing analyses, problematic. Inconsistencies of language, lack of conceptual integrity and a collage of unquilted floating signifiers leaves his program ideally complicit to the requirements of neoliberal articulation. His undertaking, however, can be read as a reassuring essay for reformist thinkers who function within a theological framework. It seeks to provide, through the six keys, 1) a moral and doctrinal criteria, 2) a locus for interpretative activity, and 3) a method and ethos 'that produce and shape a contextual understanding of the word of God in an unjust society' (ibid, 87.)

As the chapter has demonstrated, however, in the first instance, Esack tends to conflate analytic and synthetic reasoning, lacks proceptual substance and operates with a disabling 'reified anthropomorphism'; acknowledging a quality doesn't translate into embodiment or functionality thereof[85]. Second a 'loose rhetoric' about the people and the marginalised can easily be and often is appropriated for questionable hegemonic projects (the South African experience is a striking historical and political example). Third, Esack's reluctance to develop coherent conceptual arguments undermines his broader project. Equally, if not more, significant, is the shift in his habitus, from subsisting on the margins to the spectacle of the practico-inert. Surely, it must, as he often bemoans, seriously affect his praxis and the kind of 'being' and 'knowing' which attends it.

Having engaged Esack's compressed articulation of the Quranic language for responding to an unjust society, through the keys, we proceed to the question of friend and foe as conceptualised by Esack through his retrieval of pivotal notions within the Quranic paradigm. It should be

[85] RA can also be explained as a form of a priorism. An a priori proposition is one which can be known to be true without any justification from the character of the subject's experience. This does not involve the character of the thinker's experience. Being a priori is to be sharply distinguished from being necessary, from being true purely in virtue of meaning, and from being knowable infallibly. (Boghossian and Peacocke, 2000: 1-9).

noted that the hermeneutical keys have an ambivalent value. At times they appear as mere direct translations of the populist rhetoric of the period such as tawhid/unity, adl/justice, al-nas/the people etc. However, deeper investigation and wider rigorous conversation could unearth new angles on Quran and the quotidian.

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Chapter 4

Qur'an, Politics and Alterity: Esack's defence

Esack's theopolitical vision and praxis requires, as insinuated by the title of his book, Quran Liberation and Pluralism, that he demonstrates the cosmopolitan and emancipatory themes of the Quran. This demonstration should have at least two parts. The first part in Esack's approach comprises a theory of hermeneutics and a contextual political application, the SA anti-apartheid struggle, mediated through a set of hermeneutical keys. The previous two chapters addressed the latter aspects. The second part, also comprises two sections. The first, which this chapter addresses, answers the question how does the Quran help us define allies and adversaries in the struggle against injustice? The second, relating to his political calculus, will be examined in the final chapter. This chapter examines the rearticulation of key Quranic concepts and themes Esack uses in his defence of a qualified inclusivist hermeneutic of the Quran. This chapter will also, towards the end, begin an interrogation of his allied political discourse.

The kernel of his argument rests upon two manoeuvres. First, a selective intertextual archaeology and reconstruction of certain key concepts pertaining to the Quran, Islam, *iman*, *din*, and *kufr*/'Other'. Second, drawing a clear distinction between reified Islam seen as an 'ethno-social membership of a particular group' (Esack, 1997, 125, 130-133) and the more perennialist personalist concept of Islam as 'the possibility of personal submission outside the parameters of the historical community of Islam.' (Esack 1997, 125, 127, 132)

Two provisos should be clarified. Firstly, I refer to Esack's reading as a 'qualified inclusivist' reading because eligibility of those included is uncompromisingly characterised by their acceptance of *tawhid* (Esack, 1997, 120) and a commitment to social justice (Esack, 1997, 125). Second, Esack deploys the expression 'reified Islam' extensively throughout these sections, and some elaboration seems appropriate. He has plucked and cobbled the notion of

reification from Cantwell-Smith's work, The Meaning and End of Religion, William Cantwell-Smith, 1991. According to Esack (1997, 127), 'The process [of reification] has eroded the more pluralist understanding of the term Islam and supplanted it with a rigid formal religious system'. Based on his written ruminations, we can safely conclude that reified Islam, for Esack, connotes exclusivity, a sense of religious superiority, and an attachment to sectarian ritual forms which generally spurn the humanist, egalitarian and what Esack terms the 'universal underpinnings in the term Islam' (Esack, 1997: 133).

Reconstructing Self and Other through the lexical prism and Exegetical Traditions of the Quran

According to Esack,

> Islam is not the sole possession of Muslims who identify with the historical *ummah* (community) of Islam … this acknowledgement of the potential of others outside the house of reified Islam to respond to God, and the challenge of submitting to Him (i.e. Islam) in their own ways is more widespread than is commonly supposed (Esack, 1997: 116).

How, if at all, does the Quran and its intertextual milieu support the view that?

Esack maintains that a diligent archaeology of the key terms *iman, Islam, din* and *kufr* as they have been articulated within the Quran and its allied literary traditions (exegetical, legal, prophetic traditions and philosophy) will validate the aforementioned understanding. He however, insists that his approach of 'the liberation of all people' (Esack, 1997: 116) be unmistakably distinguished from 'the liberal discourse advocating some form of religious pluralism ... by most Muslim modernists' (Esack, 1997: 116). He avers that, unlike the approach he favours, the liberal approach glosses over the Quranic position on *kufr*, the reprehensible other. Whether he is able to demonstrate the validity of his claim remains uncertain. Although seemingly tangential to the main concern of this chapter, a brief digression

on the issue of 'liberals' generally and 'modernist Muslim liberals' in particular, will help to highlight how Esack's political rhetoric too often overshadows and encumbers his discursive coherence and orientation. Esack's objection to liberalism in general and the liberalism of modernist Muslims particularly appears to rest on the view that their religious pluralism ignores the Quranic position on *kufr* and generally does not define the adversary (Esack, 1997: 116). Three points can be considered. First, according to Gamble[86] 'Liberalism came to stand for progress and opposition to all forms of obscurantism, tradition, privilege, and prejudice, and therefore became identified with capitalism, rationalism, science, secularism, and more generally with modernity and the rise of the modern state.' Second, liberalism in SA provided a 'consistent indictment of what it saw as the political and social injustice and economic irrationality of segregation and apartheid'[87]. Third, in respect of Muslim modernists, Esack's complaint that they are unclear about the objectionable 'other' applies with equal relevance and force to his 'anti-apartheid' position. Esack's discourse vacillates. Despite its populist rhetoric, it was conceptually quiet on the historical race/class and transformation debate in SA. The race/class debate engendered several historiographies and definitions of ally and adversary pertinent to the SA liberation discourse. Nonetheless, together with his political allies', Esack's populist rhetoric, which included BC, pan-Africanist, liberal and socialist slogans and elements, was eagerly relinquished to the ANC's authoritarian populism. His position on the objectionable 'other' is politically and historically equally vague and fraught with inconsistency. Is Esack by his own definition then not simply another liberal?

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[86] (Ritzer, 2006, 2623) Blackwell companion to sociology.

[87] See for example: As a consistent indictment of what it saw as the political and social injustice and economic irrationality of segregation and apartheid, in a general sense, liberal historical writing may be seen as something of a manifesto for a multiracial capitalist society built on individual rights. Naturally, however soft or hard its centre, liberal writings remained an essentially oppositional historiography. (Ross, Mager,l Nasson, 2011, 3). And, 'the Dispatch, owned by an independent trust, became a crusading liberal paper. Not least as a result of his personal contacts with Steve Biko, Woods went further than most in providing space for radical black consciousness views in the mid-1970s.' (Beinhart, 2001, 189)

What exactly distinguishes Esack's view from the view of the liberal Muslim is vague; no systematic or historical description is volunteered. As the above definition, and accompanying arguments, and footnotes, explicitly indicate, liberals, both historically and theoretically, were opposed to 'privilege and prejudice'. Perhaps Esack's entanglement in the, often meaningless, partisan political polemics of the time prompted this 'emblematic'[88] remark.

Rethinking and Retrieving Iman

Esack introduces this section with an indicative quote from the Quran,

> Indeed, the *mu'minun* are those whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned; and whose *iman* is strengthened whenever His *ayat* (signs) are conveyed unto them; and who place their trust in their Sustainer. Those who are constant in prayer and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. It is they who are truly the *mu'min* … (Q: 8: 2-4)

In his interpretation of the term *iman*, Esack provides an etymological account bolstered by references to its exegetical trajectory. The root of this word, suggests 'being secure', 'trusting in', 'turning to' from which several inflections and nuances ensue. Citing the lexicographer Lane (1980: 1-7), Esack (1997: 117-8), concurs that its principal meaning is '…becoming true to the trust with respect to which God has confided in one by a firm believing with the heart; not by profession of belief with the tongue only.'

Esack (1997: 118, 122) affirms this definition by adducing Rahman's (1983: 171) view that '…*iman* is an act of the heart, a decisive giving oneself up to God and His message and gaining peace, and security and fortification against tribulation. The separation of faith from action is, for the Quran, a totally untenable and absurd situation.'

[88] Protagonists of the anti-apartheid struggle often try to enhance their political credentials by taking an ideological swipe at an undefined liberalism.

Esack (1997, 118) elaborates, the term, *iman*, and its modulations, appears 244 times in the Quran. The term refers essentially to Muhammad, but it also refers to Moses and other prophets acknowledged by the Quran. Moreover, predicated upon a tradition of the prophet, Esack (1997: 120) maintains that, 'The least of *iman* will save one in the hereafter and *Iman* is of various kinds and has seventy branches. The highest is the testimony that there is no deity except God, and the lowest is the removal of an obstacle from the road. …even modesty is a branch of faith.'

For Esack, however, '*iman* is a personal recognition of and active response to the presence of God in the universe and in history' (Esack, 1997, 120: 125). After alluding to some of the religious scholastic quibbling that attended the exegetical traditions of the word, Esack (1997: 122) asserts that 'the insistence on viewing righteous deeds as an intrinsic part of *iman* is well founded in the Quran, where the phrase 'those who have *iman* and do righteous deeds' appears no less than thirty-six times.' Traditional scholarship which, according to Esack (1997: 122), adopted a reified view of Islam, has unduly curtailed the full splendour of *iman* and the narrative identity of those with *iman* by confining 'righteous deeds' to no more than pious ritual and narrow ethno-social group identification. A brief deliberation on Esack's use of the description 'traditional Islamic scholarship' is required. Several unaddressed underlying questions should be asked. Is Esack referring to the local theocratic formations in his immediate environment? Was this simply a monolithic cultural phenomenon? Were there no variations? There could have been political and other issues such as moral, leadership, and theoretical ones. Does this suggest Esack's approach was ideologically sectarian and individualistic? Is his subjective opinion sufficient to provide a reasonable description of the social and political dynamics of the context? At another level, does his reference include the formidable intellectual and theosophical legacy of global Islam? In reference to the latter tradition, which methodologically and epistemologically comprises several axes and range from rationalism to

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fideism, Esack offhandedly glosses over the complexities, multiplicities and nuances of thought generated by this history. His approach suggests 1) his unquestioning excessive dependence on euromodernist sensibilities, 2) a one-dimensionality that undermines the effort to develop an alternative archive and 3) his theosophical and theopolitical position is tenuous, as it is, based merely on his unsubstantiated claims.

For Muslim activists struggling against apartheid, in the 1980s, an apathetic pietistic approach was flagrantly unacceptable (ibid, 123). These Muslim activists, galvanised by the bravery and sacrifice of others, within and outside of ethno-sociological Islam, wrestled vigorously with the semantic and pragmatic implications of concepts such as *iman* and other pivotal signifiers. In Esack's view, and crucial to his overarching argument, these questions were and are critically pertinent to conceptualising firstly, righteous deeds and its relationship to faith and secondly, defining 'friend and foe' in the struggle for social justice.

In articulating his position on *iman*, Esack (1997: 118-124) begins by acknowledging the differential vertical (semantic) and horizontal (syntactic) character of the concept historically and theologically. He observes that it has 'variously been defined as: affirmation, verbal testimony, belief or righteous conduct' (ibid, 118). Esack (1997: 120), elsewhere states that some of the senses imply 'the possibility of one simultaneously being both a believer and a non-believer'. He also reminds us (Esack, 1997: 124) that the Quran (6:82) speaks of 'those who have *iman* and do not mix their *iman* with injustice.' It also (49:9) refers 'to a group among the *mu'minun* acting wrongfully' (Esack, 1997: 124). He furthermore avers that 'the Quran acknowledges a diluted form of *iman'* (Esack, 1997: 125).

While Esack seems to admit to certain intractable textual features, he proceeds confidently nonetheless. Regarding the first issue, deeds and faith, Esack maintains that, despite the multiple readings and a history of theopolitical tensions, *iman* can, and should, be justifiably

understood as a necessary synergy of faith and action. This action involves, at least, both 'a deeply personal response to God' (Esack, 1997: 125) and an embodied sense of socio-economic equity (Esack, 1997: 121). On the second issue, 'friends and foes', Esack argues as follows. Neither our theopolitical allies nor adversaries should be defined by token membership to ethno-sociological communities or reified religious affiliation. His stance, he believes, is grounded on historical, theological and ethico-logical motivations. Briefly, he argues; theologically, since *iman* is a 'deeply personal response to God, it cannot be confined to a particular socio-religious community' (Esack, 1997, 125). Moreover, the Quran, Esack (1997: 124-5) insists '…is explicit about the *iman* of the People of the Book. On several occasions it employs the term for those who coexist with the community of Muhammad, but are not part of it.'

Historically, Esack (ibid.) remains convinced, despite the obfuscating efforts of conservative sectarianist interpretations, it is generally acknowledged that '…there were *mu'minun* in the non-sociological sense of the word i.e. outside the Muhammadan community.' Ethically and logically, 'If *iman* can embrace the removal of a banana peel from the road,' (Esack, 1997: 125) how can it not embrace the lifelong commitment of persons dedicated to serve and emancipate 'those with whom God himself has chosen to identify, the oppressed and marginalised' (ibid).

Hence, for Esack, *despite the textual ambiguities cited above*, from a Quranic perspective, theopolitical solidarity or the definition of the other cannot be based on mere verbal affirmation of group identity without the accompanying reflective equilibrium and holistic praxis. He reinforces this view by citing a prophetic tradition (Esack, 1997: 123) 'whosoever walks with the oppressor has gone forth from Islam.'

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Redefining Islam and *Din*

In his attempt to recuperate what he ironically regards as the pristine (or for him politically more appropriate) meaning of the concept of Islam, and its kindred concept *din*[89], Esack (1997: 126) acknowledges that a cursory reading of the text and its intertextual traditions could concede to a reified exclusivist interpretation thereof. Such a reading, however, would not minister to his avowed political program – 'interreligious solidarity against oppression.'

He begins his deconstruction of the exclusivist interpretation of Islam by citing a few of the widely venerated voices, classical and modern, of the exegetical traditions of Islam. The following citations form the core of Esack's (1997, 127) reconstruction of the concept of Islam and *din*.

Al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), whom he cites through secondary translated sources, is of the view that Islam is, on one level, 'the act of joining the group of Muslims and the name of that group, and on another level … *personal surrender of the heart.*

For Ibn Arabi (d. 1240 CE), to be a Muslim means that I have *severed myself from my ego and achieved annihilation in Him.*

For Zamakshari (d. 1143 CE), Islam means *'equity and tawhid'*.

For Al-Razi (d. 925 CE) Islam has three meanings: entry into Islam (submission), entry into peace, and *purifying all service for God.*

Rida (d. 1935) espouses the view that 'authentic Islam, is the *intensely personal submission of the individual to God* and the universal spirit in which all religious communities partake … this submission bears no relationship to conventional Islam which is trapped in imitation and in

[89] The word *din* is loosely used as the English equivalent of religion, but as the text will demonstrate its etymology in the Islamic intellectual legacy is more nuanced.

ethno-sociological communities. Curiously, Rida is the only modern scholar cited here. Rida, and Cantwell-Smith, seem to offer Esack the linguistic and rhetoric means he requires for this section.

Esack's selection of opinions on the nature of Islam and being a Muslim tend to buttress his view that a reified exclusivist ethno-sociological Islam is an incomplete and misleading representation, because in terms of 'a proper reading' *Islam* and *Iman* 'cannot be confined to a particular socio-religious community (Esack 1997: 125) and, 'group identity should not be allowed to subvert a principle of personal accountability' (ibid, 144). It is unclear what this 'proper' reading is insofar as he vociferously proclaims that the hermeneutical task is 1) unquestionably governed by political interests, 2) as such, text is mere pretext and 3) both these imperatives are ineluctable (Esack, 1997, 73). It should be noted that Esack relies almost exclusively on the opinions of Cantwell-Smith and Rida throughout this section (Esack, 1997, 125)

Commentary on the concept of *din* is necessary because the Quran in several instances 'refers to Islam as the only *din* acceptable to God' (Esack, 1997: 126). Esack's archaeological and etymological expeditions regarding the meaning of the word *din* yield the following synopsis. In seventh-century Arabia the word *din* had three principal semantic orientations. First, as a concept for systematic religion, second, as a 'verbal noun' for 'passing judgement', and 'judging', and third, denoting 'to behave', 'conform', and 'observe certain practices'. Endorsing the findings of Haddad (1974), Esack agrees that certain nuances of meaning in the word *din* are discernible 'in the various periods of the Quran's revelation' (Esack, 1997: 128). Haddad (1974, 122), however, cautions, while there were subtle semantic inflections associated with the different periods of usage, 'the essence of the meaning … appears to have remained constant.' Typically, Esack does not integrate this aspect of her findings into his analysis. In

the early phases of revelation, Esack (1997, 129) maintains that, the meaning of *din* emphasised 'humankind's response to God' and the recommended way of believing and behaving. In the middle phases of revelation, 'din seems to emphasise a personal commitment of the individual to God' (ibid, 129). In the third phase, 'there is an identification of the unchanging *din* with the community of Abraham and the straight path.' (Esack, 1997: 129). Thereafter, Esack argues 'the emphasis on *din* as personal commitment is switched to the use of the term for commitment in the collective sense' (Esack, 1997, 129). However, Esack (ibid, 130) contends, citing Cantwell-Smith, while the words Islam and *din* '…could conjure up the idea of Islam as a reified entity, one religion among others, this was by no means the only, and, indeed not even the primary, interpretation.'

Further studies, he claims, seem to suggest that the etymology of the word developed along two axes. The first pertains to the 'internal and external aspects of surrender, i.e., between Islam as affirmation and Islam as external conformity' (Esack, 1997: 131). The second, concerns the individual and the group aspects of Islam. For Esack (ibid, 132), both senses of 'Islam as *din'*, 'the personalist sense as well as the group sense are contained in the word and in the texts wherein it occurs.' (Esack, 1997: 132). Therefore, contemporary Muslim thinking should allow the term to be applied to 'submission within the framework of group identification as well as … personal submission outside the parameters of the historical community of Islam.'

Thus, for Esack, an inclusivist non-sectarian Islam, which reaches beyond the strictures of reified ethno-sociological proclivities, based on *tawhid* and a commitment to social equity, is a natural corollary of the intertextual legacy of the Quran and its key concepts *Iman*, *Islam*, *din* and *kufr*.

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Curiously, it should be noted that Esack doesn't explore a) the variations between Haddad and Cantwell-Smith in one instance and b) the methodological and theoretical differences between the two of them (as a category) and the varieties offered by traditional Islamic scholarship. One of Esack's main reservations towards the works of traditional Muslim exegetes is the fact that their context 'simply did not produce the kinds of questions that modernity or South African apartheid raised' (1997: 133). His route however is not without its own easy oversights. First he depends almost entirely on the views of Cantwell-Smith (see Esack 1997: 117 – 134) without once problematizing his cultural and theoretical proclivities. Second, in referring to the traditional exegetes he shuns the probability of significant variation and nuance in politics, methodology and theory, thereby (mis)representing an arrantly simplistic image of their contribution.

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Politics of *Kufr*

Why is the concept of *Kufr* significant? Esack answers, simply 'Because (in the Quran) it occurs very frequently in contrast to the word *mumin*' (Esack, 1997, 136) (Izutsu, 1966, 26).

Esack commences the discussion on *kufr* with a quote from the Quran (3: 21-2).

> Verily, as for those who reject/are ungrateful (*yakfur*) for the signs of God, and slay the Prophets against all right, and slay people who enjoin justice, announce unto them a grievous chastisement. It is they whose works shall come to nought, both in this world and the life to come; and they shall have none to succour them.

He then, directs our attention to the following inferences. The verse suggests an affinity between the doctrinal (*kufr*) and the socio-political (Justice). The expression 'those who reject the signs of God' is one of several ways in which the Quran exegetes construe the 'rejected other' through the various forms of the word *kufr*. According to Esack's (1997: 135) investigations, it is generally agreed, that the most common original usage of the word was to describe 'concealing an act of grace or kindness.' He cites semanticists such as Izutsu that

while the word is historically and theologically associated with disbelief, the 'real core … of its semantic structure was not "unbelief", but rather "ingratitude" or "unthankfulness"' (Esack, 1997: 136). Izutsu (1966) further developed the argument that *kufr* acquired the augmented meaning of 'one who does not believe in God' because, in the Quran, it occurs frequently in contrast to the word *mumin*. Given that *kufr* can be read as an antonym of *Iman* and *Islam*, Esack advocates that we retain the following. 'Its earliest meaning should never be abandoned' (Esack, 1997: 136). It should not be reduced exclusively to its basic doctrinal sense. And, the Quranic portrayal of 'kufr as an attitude of ingratitude leading to the wilful rejection of known truths, God's gifts, and a pattern of actively arrogant and oppressive behaviour' (Esack, 1997: 137), is key to a proper comprehension of the theopolitical ethos of the Quran.

Esack insists that the idea of *kufr*, like the other three terms, *iman*, *Islam* and *din*, has to be and can be legitimately expanded beyond the doctrinal, reified denotative range wherein it is mostly confined. This latter usage denotes anyone not part of the historical ethno-sociological community. The ideas associated with this narrow area revolve around the meaning of 'unbeliever' and tends to endorse a literal exclusivist reading of the Quran. Citing linguistic (Izutsu, 1966), theological (Asad, 1980) and historical analyses (Rahman, 1966) Esack uncovers meanings that resonate favourably with his perennialist interpretation of *iman*, *Islam* and *din*. Scholars, such as the aforementioned and others in that vein, from their respective disciplinary perspectives, argue that the connotative zone within which the word *kufr* derives its semantic substance comprises the terms ingratitude, wilful rejection of known truths, injustice, arrogance, insolence, egocentric behaviour, sectarian/doctrinal antagonism, perverse reluctance to transform/improve social and personal orientations and structures (Esack, 1997: 134-9).

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However, notwithstanding some vestiges of pluralism within the Islamic intellectual tradition, there are some sections of the Quran, and its hermeneutic accompaniment, which seem to present a very challenging anomaly to Esack's inclusivist definition of *kufr*. The following verse offers an appropriate illustration. The verse (Q: 3: 21-2) reads as follows

> As to those who deny the Signs of Allah and in defiance of right, slay the prophets, and slay those who teach just dealing with mankind, announce to them a grievous penalty. They are those whose works will bear no fruit in this world and in the Hereafter nor will they have anyone to help.

According to Esack (1997: 140), despite some uncertainty and dispute over the grammatical nature and tense of key terms in the verse, most Muslim scholars/exegetes interpret it

> With a rather transparent and heavy dose of racism, they apply the text to all Jews, including those who coexisted with Muhammad in Medina. The guilt also applies to the Jewish contemporaries of Muhammad, they argue, because they 'approved of their predecessors actions'.

Most Muslim exegetes and scholars, Esack (1997, 142) maintains, without specifying, argue that Jews are irretrievably tarnished 'up to the day of judgement'. A view he regards as manifestly unjust. The hermeneutic legacy associated with the verse constitutes an aberration for Esack which his political project is obliged to resolve. He reasons thus, several eminent exegetes have profusely commended 'the status of those who struggle for justice; they compare their status to just one level below that of the prophets' (Esack, 1997: 140). Additionally, Esack maintains, none of the renown scholars made an attempt to emphasise the fact that, historically, amongst the 'religious other', there were always elements who 'in the midst of injustice, stood firm against severe odds, a fact borne out by all the accounts of the event that was supposed to occasion the revelation of this verse' (Esack, 1997: 141). As pertinent as this claim is to his cause, Esack does not substantiate it.

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For Esack, this oversight, or perhaps infelicitous collusion, with its entangled racial and religious prejudice is untenable and without foundation in the Quran. Esack contends that most traditional Muslim interpreters display 'a confusion' (Esack, 1997: 142-3) and reprehensible inconsistency in dealing with 'the other'. He maintains that the usual procedure for extrapolating the general from the particular is curiously and summarily flouted. They seem to ignore the fact that the Quran emphasises, on numerous occasions, that 'there are exceptions for virtually every negative statement about the other' (Esack, 1997: 142). While the Quran, according to Esack, speaks in terms which are cognisant of the tribal habitus of the first recipient community, its soteriological discourse clearly avoids 'corporate generalizations' and emphasises 'the ultimate accountability of individuals in front of God' (Esack, 1997: 143-4). This for him is unequivocally illustrative of the 'Quran's determination to break from notions of collective responsibility' (Esack, 1997: 144) and glib stereotyping.

Thus, by deftly rescuing the universalist and humanist sensibilities of key terms such as *iman*, *Islam*, *din* and *kufr*, Esack argues that it is demonstrably unjust and untenable, historically and scripturally, to entertain prejudicial stereotypes (religion, race, gender, culture, class) of any form within the Quranic purview. Hence, theopolitical solidarity or the definition of the other cannot be based on mere verbal affirmation of group identity without the accompanying reflective equilibrium and holistic praxis.

I conclude this section with a quote from Esack's text which delineates certain pertinent features of the complex and fluid social phenomenology his idiosyncratic agency refracts.

> The South African reality of people with 'Muslim' labels actively participating in the oppression of millions of black people, on the one hand, and people wearing an array of religious Other labels – some refusing to wear any religious label – sacrificing their lives for the cause of justice and freedom, on the other, easily convinces one of the necessity to go beyond labels (Esack, 1997: 134).

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Esack's charges against 'traditional' Muslim scholarship

In Esack's (1997: 146) carefully constructed view, 'The Quran presents a universal, inclusivist perspective of a divine being who responds to the sincerity and commitment of all His servants.' However, according to Esack (1997: 146-7) traditional Qur'anic interpretation which emphasises parochial Muslim exclusivism and a virulent denunciation of 'the Other' is a consequence of the fact that traditional scholarship show little or no 'understanding of the overall historical context of a particular revelation'; traditional scholarship tends to be selective in applying the principle of context and non-Muslim scholarship has carried most of the burden of context related studies (Esack, 1997: 128, 146). The sweeping nature of such charges suggest a methodological flaw, in Esack's approach, which this dissertation has partially addressed in chapter two and earlier in this chapter. It also prompts the question is Esack is not equally culpable of the charges he levels against traditional Muslim scholarship. Is he not as selective in his approach as he insists they are?

To justify his theopolitical disquiet and harangue against traditional Muslim scholarship, Esack undertakes to problematize[90] certain terms generally used to describe the friendly and hostile other. These terms – 'People of the Book', *munafikun*, narrow religious exclusivism, etc. - offer a characterization of the qualities and dispositions which are either consonant with or jarring to the ethos of a perennialist impression of Islamic thought.

Preliminary considerations

As Esack reads it, the Quranic stance towards the Other unfolded gradually and as a series of didactic context-specific rubrics, a specific set of conditions resulting in a specific moral and

[90] In an interview with his research assistant Francois Ewald, published shortly before his death, Foucault characterizes his current work as "problematization." The term denotes "the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and the false and constitutes it an object of thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis or the like)." *Magazine litteraire* 207 (May 1984): 18.

theological response. Hence, for Esack (1997, 147), '…one cannot speak of a "final Quranic position" towards the Other and, secondly it is wrong to apply texts of opprobrium in a universal manner to all those who one chooses to define as "People of the Book" or "disbelievers", in an ahistorical fashion.'

He substantiates his position thus. First, whenever the Quran reproaches a 'corporate or cultural act or inclination', to pre-empt the hazard of unjust generalization, it clarifies or qualifies its position by 'exceptive expressions' (Esack, 1997: 147) such as 'from among them' (Q: 3:75), 'many among them' (Q: 2:109; 5:66; 22:17; 57:26), 'most of them' (Q: 2:105; 7:102; 10:36), 'some of them' (Q: 2:145) and 'a group among them' (Q: 3:78). Second, the Qur'anic stance towards the Other was mainly guided by the responses, amiable or inimical, of alterity towards the 'establishment of an order based on *tawhid*, justice and Islam' (Esack, 1997: 148). Such responses, Esack maintains, were typically motivated by considerations of political economy. Third, Esack (ibid.), without the requisite hermeneutic discipline asserts that hostility towards Islam and the Quran was generally incited by antipathy towards the egalitarian and humanitarian vision of both.

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On the matter of 'the People of the Book' Esack (1997: 153) argues that the historically differential constituents of this category varied according to 'the theological predilections of Muslim scholars and more importantly the geo-political context in which they lived'. It would thus be, for him, an 'unjust generalization' to view any corresponding contemporary dogma as antagonistic if the practices and attitudes of the contemporary adherents were ignored (not independently appraised).

The category of the *munafiqun* (hypocrites), according to Esack, 'has been dropped in Muslim scholarly discourse because it was so clearly situation bound' and also more prevalent within intra-Muslim polemics than in inter-faith polemics (1997: 153). Where a category is situation

bound, he cites the Quranic verse[91] to absolve later generations, of the Other, where applicable, from the transgressions of their religious and or cultural predecessors.

Esack next, to enhance his concept of 'ally and adversary', proceeds with the following two assertions. One, 'the Quran relates dogma to socio-economic exploitation' (Esack, 1997: 155). Two, 'The Quran makes it clear that it was the rejection and ignorance of *tawhid* that led to social and economic oppression in Meccan society' (ibid.).

He enlists the following verses, to uphold these assertions[92];

Quran chapter 83: 1-11. Here the Quran severely admonishes those who defraud and deceive others 'Woe unto the rejecters who give a lie to the day of requital'.

Quran chapter 102: 1-8. Here the Quran reprimands

> 'you are obsessed by greed for more and more until you go to your graves…..you will most surely be called to account for what you did with the boon of life.'

Quran chapter 104: 1-4.

> 'Woe to every slanderer and backbiter, who collects and hordes wealth, He thinks that his wealth will make him last forever!'

Quran chapter 90: 5-6 and 12-16.

> 'Does he think that no one has power over him? He may say (boastfully); Wealth have I squandered in abundance!'

and

[91] Q: 2: 141 - Now, they were a people who passed away. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you earn; you shall not be questioned concerning what they did.

[92] We should recall from chapter 3, that Esack's application and usage of the procept *tawhid* (together with the other five hermeneutical keys) is inchoate[92], and used more as a rhetorical device than a mature theopolitical construct. The meaning and significance of his assertion is therefore problematic and elusive.

> ‘and what will explain to thee the path that is steep? It is the freeing of a slave, or feeding on a day of severe hunger to an orphan near of kin. Or to the indigent (down) in the dust.’

The link between the rejection of God and *din* on the one side and callous selfishness on the other, Esack reminds us, is even more emphatically and explicitly expressed in Quran chapter 107: 1-8.

> ‘Have you seen the one who calls the religion a lie? That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness, and never encourages the feeding of the destitute. So woe to the praying ones, Who are unmindful of their prayers, Those who do good deeds only to be seen (of men), Yet refuse small kindnesses!’

In Esack’s interpretation, there is no doubt that these and similar verses affirm 1) that a denial of *tawhid* results in profligate and self-centred behaviour and 2) a positive correlation between faith and an active social conscience (Esack, 1997: 156). Furthermore, he contends, quranic opprobrium was not directed as much at differences in religious form as at those who deliberately distort scripture to vindicate elitism, unjust hierarchies and exploitative socio-economic practices (Esack, 1997: 156-8). The notion of the religious other, in Esack’s reasoning, is therefore reconstructed on the minimum basis of two *sine qua non*. One, a reverent expanding response to the transcendent. Two, and indivisible from the first, an active commitment to an egalitarian and humanitarian social order.

His Quranic reference for the preceding conclusion is given in the following excerpt from the Quran (3; 113-4),

> The People of the Book are not all the same. Some of them are straightforward. They recite the words of God in prostration at night. They believe in God and the Day of Judgment. They command people to follow good, prohibit others from committing evil and compete with each other in doing good deeds. These are the righteous ones.

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Whence Religious Arrogance?

In offering his account of the genealogy of historical or reified Muslim arrogance and exclusivist orientation, Esack acknowledges the importance of an historical analysis. Ironically[93], however, he deflects such an analysis, and focuses instead on language and hermeneutics in engaging 'the arguments that traditional exegesis employed to circumvent the obvious meaning of inclusiveness in qur'anic texts' (Esack, 1997: 161).

Thus Esack cites the following Qur'anic verse to illustrate the kind of theopolitical 'puzzles' traditional exclusivist exegetes had to navigate and the resolutions they contrived.

> Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (Q: 2:62).

For Esack, This verse, and other similar verses, certainly seem to suggest that the Quran offers a conditional inclusivist outlook. For Esack, most traditional exegetes 'avoid the explicit meaning of these texts'. (1997: 162). He explains the explicit meaning as 'anyone who has faith in God … and who acts in a righteous manner will attain salvation' (ibid.). Esack maintains that traditional exegetes[94] devised two approaches 'to circumvent the more apparent meaning' (1997: 162). First, they argued that Q: 3:85 abrogated Q: 2:62.

> If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good). (Q: 3:85)

Secondly, he declares, they proposed that 'the acceptable other refers to converts from other religions' (Esack, 1997: 163). The main thrust of their arguments are untenable according to

[93] This is ironical because Esack insists on the inescapable importance of historical, context related interpretation throughout his writings.

[94] A major problem with Esack's text is that many of referents (traditional exegetes for example) remain inadequately problematized and appear as an untenable undifferentiated singularity.

Esack. According to him, the abrogation argument fails because 1) it implies God reneges on a promise (Esack 1997: 163) and 2) '(Quran 3:85), the supposedly abrogating text, is no less inclusive than (Quran 2:62) (Esack 1997: 163). On the question of converts, Esack reminds us, 'the entire early Muslim community were converts' (1997: 164). Even after the realisation of an identifiable Muslim community, there is no evidence that such converts subsisted as a separate socio-religious category, and because converts are already included in the first category, 'there is no convincing need to single them out as Jews, Christians, and Sabeans' (ibid.).

Esack (1997: 165) concludes, citing Rida[95] (1980) and Tabatabai (1973)[96] that all those who have faith in God and act righteously, regardless of formal religious affiliation, will be saved. '…for Allah does not favour one group while mistreating another' (Rida, 1980, 336) and 'no name, no adjective can do any good unless it is backed by faith and righteous deeds. This rule is applicable to all human beings' (Tabatabai, 1973, 193). While these selected citations cohere with Esack's situated theopolitical aspirations, the question has to be asked, what interpretation(s) would be derived if these comments were placed within their respective historical, paradigmatic contexts? There are several positions where Esack and the authors he cites to support one argument differ with him on others (see reference to both Rida and Tabatabai on page 140 for instance). As demonstrated in chapter two and elsewhere in this dissertation, Esack's deployment of intertextual material is often haphazard and unreliable.

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[95] Historians have demonstrated that Rida's theopolitical discourse has three distinct (incommensurable) phases. Esack's unqualified citations of Rida are thus problematic.

[96] Esack's citation of traditional scholarship, in general, and from individual works tends to be highly selective.

What of Religious Diversity?

Constructing a Quranic position on the question of religious diversity, Esack proceeds as follows. First, he establishes that diversity is part of the divine plan with the following citations and annotations. The Quran regards Muhammad as 'one of a galaxy of prophets' (Esack, 1997: 166). It refers to 'others you do not know' (Q 40:78). It declares, the same *din* was 'enjoined on Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus' (Q 42:13). It addresses Muhammad by saying 'You are but a warner, every people has had its guide' (Q 13:08). The Quran states, 'unto every one of you have We appointed a (different) *shirah* (path) and *minhaj* (way) (Q 5:48).

Next Esack focuses on the full verse (Q 5:48) seemingly to excavate an intelligible cause for religious diversity.

> And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it, therefore judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their low desires (to turn away) from the truth that has come to you; for every one of you did We appoint a law (*shirah*) and a way (*minhaj*), and if Allah had pleased He would have made you (all) a single people (*ummah*), but that He might try you in what He gave you, therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds; to Allah is your return, of all (of you), so He will let you know that in which you differed.

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According to Esack, traditional exegetes who have interpreted this verse have relied on a variety of linguistic contrivances to deflect the obvious 'implications for religious pluralism' (Esack, 1997: 168). For him however, their efforts 'present several difficulties and are evidently inconsistent with both its context and apparent meaning' (Esack, 1997: 168)[97].

His procedure is as follows. First, he contends, the narrational inner-texture and historical intertexture of the verse locates the 'prophet as arbitrator' in a real religiously heterogeneous society. Second, he claims, contrary to the theory of *naskh* supercessionist (earlier revelation

[97] Once again, Esack may be correct, but without a systematic summary of the scholars and thoughts alluded to, as Abu Zayd does, how is the reader expected to appraise the merits of his claims?

is superseded by Islam) arguments, the statement 'he will let you know that in which you differed' means that the differences were amongst contemporaries (not between pre-Muhammadan and Muhammadan communities). Third, Esack argues that because the verse urges 'strive (compete) with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds' the audience had to be contemporary neighbours. He says 'meaningful competition can only be engaged in by contemporaneous communities who share similar advantages and disadvantages' (Esack 1997: 169). Therefore, according to Esack's logic, the Quran is referring to Muslims and the Others who lived alongside them. He also argues that the two terms *din* and *shariah* enable us to speak of a variety of particular 'paths' yet a uniform universal 'response' (Esack, 1997: 167). The latter presumably encompassing the former.

While arguing fervently for pluralism, Esack concedes that 'The Quran makes several references to the theological difficulties of religious pluralism and of *kufr*' (Esack, 1997: 172).

However, in view of such challenges, the Quran according to Esack, urges patience and humility and the sense to allow God to 'inform humankind about them on the day of requital' (Esack, 1997: 172). It would seem apt to conclude this section with the following citations. The Quran is explicit only about inviting to God and to the path of God … (for) God is above the diverse paths emanating from him (Esack, 1997, 174)

> Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection about that wherein you used to differ (Q 22:69).

Esack does not see the need to provide a theological and/or logical account relating issues of the present to the various dimensions of humanity's relationship to text and the transcendent.

Problematic Analysis

At one point Esack states 'The past is not the past, it is the present' (1997: 76). On another page of the same text Esack declares that 'gradual and contextual development of the Quranic

position … has significant implications' (1997: 147 also 54-63). Elsewhere Esack says 'the need for solidarity between all oppressed people in an unjust and exploitative society requires going beyond the situation-bound categories of the Quran' (Esack, 1997: 153).

What is Esack suggesting? It seems that he is proposing the following: 1) all meaning is essentially a contemporary construction (or contrivance), related to the spatio-temporal framework and predilections of the interpreting agent 2) Quranic meaning can only be excavated by accounting for context and situation, and 3) Qur'anic categories are insufficient and, therefore, need to be transcended. The third point implicitly raises the question, why a scripture at all? Propositions one and two present an immediate and serious inconsistency. How is the relationship between contrived and excavated meanings balanced and managed? He does not explain the linguistic inconsistencies nor the conceptual dialectic between these apparently contrary propositions. If we are bound by context how do we read the past in a manner that offers extraneous insight? If meaning depends on both past and present without conceptually rationalising this, we seem saddled with a disabling paradox. On the question of selective category application and innovation Esack, cites the vacillating prevalence of the word *munafiqun* (hypocrite).

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He asserts that, although it is a Quranic category, it 'has been dropped in Muslim scholarly discourse because it was so clearly situation bound' (1997: 153). It is unclear what he is trying to prove. He seems to be suggesting that the situation, not the text, determines the relevant conceptual semantic schema. Who decides and how is the conceptual schema constructed? If situation is the principal determinant of meaning and category relevance, what is the role of the text? Esack repeatedly insists on situation bound readings where context overwhelmingly determines meaning often at the expense of even a literal reading of the text (see page 18 on

'explicit meaning'). As Eco (1992), Riceour (1974, 1981) and others have cogently argued the text has to be afforded greater respect. The implausibility of his defence serves merely to affirm, in his hermeneutic, the pervasiveness of interpretative expediency. This *aporia*, however, is consistent with his view that the text can and should serve as a pretext for political concerns (Esack 1997: 73).

Further evidence of this interpretative expediency and *aporia* is given in the following. According to Esack, the method of RH which he has embraced and promoted asserts that hermeneutics 'does not try to recover an author's elusive intention' (1997: 63). Esack also maintains that 'the meaning assigned to a text by any exegete cannot exist independently of his or her personality and environment' (Esack, 1997: 62). He reinforces this unqualified constructivism by affirming the inevitability of 'ever-changing understandings' (Esack, 1997: 63).

If, as Esack contends, 'author's intention is elusive', 'meaning is context bound', and 'meaning is ever-changing', how does he suggest we guard against, in his words, the 'uncritical imposition of ideas on to the text' (Esack, 1997, 106) because it will deprive the reader of 'the visionary insights the Quran is capable of supplying'. At critical junctures in his hermeneutic tussles, Esack suddenly seeks recourse in 'religious thought in the early centuries' (Esack, 1997: 136) and insists, to bolster a particular position, that 'its earliest meaning should never be abandoned' (1997: 131). Text/context, 'ever-changing meanings'; 'explicit meanings of text', the contradictions are patent, and intellectually and ethically disconcerting.

Again the tension between some form of 'textual or linguistic essence or independence' and a pragmatic unqualified relativism linked to a situation-bound semantic constructivism has the potential to undermine the ethical motives of his venture, to retrieve a liberation theology for the margins. In failing to explicate these linguistic inconsistencies and conceptual *aporia*,

Esack tends towards an 'anything goes' conclusion or Methodological Hedonism. Such an approach can easily be enlisted to support any position or practice, whether to recall slavery or extreme forms of patriarchy.

The issue is aggravated when we consider his vociferous proclamation that the hermeneutical task is 1) unquestionably governed by political interests, 2) as such, text is mere pretext and 3) both these imperatives are ineluctable (Esack, 1997: 73).

Exaggerated Theological Dialectics and Elitist Political Homiletics

Esack's epistemic orientation, discursive terrain and concept of community are key intimately intertwined descriptors of his theopolitical praxis. They allow us a view of how he constructs meaning and positions himself and his arguments in relation to his allies and adversaries. His concept of and relationship to 'community' serves as an indication of his approach to political activism and social transformation.

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Esack's epistemic orientation is largely a function of his theological dialectics and concept of community both shaped by certain themes and concerns. He is emphatic about the need for inter-religious solidarity against oppression (1997). As he repeatedly laments, traditional Muslim exegetes present several semantic and political obstacles to his project particularly pertinent to issues of faith, friends, foes, and freedom. He has chosen, as the chapter illustrates, to engage such adversity through the conventional method of clerical hermeneutic dialectics based on etymology and a selective engagement with the local version of the Islamic intertextual legacy. Consciously or otherwise, he frames the polemic within a me/them model. The latter binary is problematic and, from a margin's perspective, has several ambiguous consequences. In theory and practice it excludes the full potential of 'the multiple'. It betrays an elitist epistemic and logic which 1) ironically places him (as vanguardist) in the same

relation to the subaltern as his opponents rendering him, like them, an elitist expert, and 2) thus naturally undermines pluralist *differance*[98] and is practically unable to integrate the rich polyphony of subaltern meditations to expand the horizon and nature of the epistemological dialogue and outcome.

Esack's discursive *monologue*[99] is about *his* homiletics vis-à-vis traditionalists (generally this refers to a local theocratic elite with variable cultural authority and ideological orientation). The voices and aspirations of the marginalised are 'interpreted' not heard and entertained.

Another pertinent feature of his theopolitical rhetoric is the glaring absence of even a hint of an attempt to destabilize the hegemonic western understandings of social transformation, political possibility, knowledge production, and the relationship between immaterial intellectual labour and socio-political activism. The elitist, patriarchal, and hierarchical undertow of Western-modernist political theory, in both Right and Left intellectual discourses, as exposed by poststructuralist and decolonial scholars, is overwhelming and pervasive in his thinking. Instead, the main objects of his fulminations are those he vaguely and problematically labels liberals and conservatives.

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As a corollary to this he operates, unsurprisingly, with simplified notions of community and social identity suggesting untenable linear correlations between doctrine, identity and practice. This, while blithely ignoring the complexities of communal identification and the dynamics of

[98] Differance in this instance to a logic of the supplement, of *differance*, rather than of identity; a logic of both/and. Also, the movement from a presence (a knowing) to things different, a theoretically endless movement. (Wolfreys, Julian. *Deconstruction. Derrida*. London: Macmillan, 1998.)

[99] In monologism, 'truth', constructed abstractly and systematically from the dominant perspective. It performs a kind of discursive 'death' of the other who remains unheard and unrecognised. The monological word 'gravitates towards itself and its referential object'. Dialogism in contrast recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. Discourse does not logically unfold (as in analytical philosophy), but rather, interacts. This makes dialogical works a lot more meaningful and less partisan than their monological counterparts, since they don't subordinate reality to the ideology of the author. A dialogical work constantly engages with and is informed by other works and voices, as it seeks general enrichment and improvement. Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.

rationality and meaning-making that occur within the swirling sea of heterogeneous social struggle. The recurring motif of reductionism in Esack's thinking, has significant disclosures and consequences. A substantial part of his activism, based literally on international and national stages, was defined by vanguardist[100] political spectacle and rhetoric rather than rearguardist[101] re/deconstructive action with the oppressed. His ontological terrain is given by elite directed polemics, rather than practical and grounded within the everyday. Hence, political repartee is easier and more appealing than the painstaking practical engagement and transformation of complex existential sensibilities regarding knowledge, self, other, and right on the ground. This approach is indicative of a methodological individualism as opposed to an organic dialogical approach from and with the margins.

As Bhavnani and Haraway (1994: 21) point out: 'We repeatedly rehistoricize ourselves by telling a story; we relocate ourselves in the present historical moment by reconfiguring our identities. There is no such thing as a subject who pre-exists the encounters that construct that subject. Identity is an effect of those encounters.'

Although patently evident even during the anti-apartheid struggle, recent political, ethnographic and cultural studies increasingly reaffirm[102] the subaltern view that everyday life

[100] Vanguard theory, by its nature, does not let itself be taken by surprise or feel wonderment. Whatever does not fit the vanguardists' previsions or propositions either does not exist or is not relevant.

[101] Rearguard theories can only validate themselves by their practical results, by the evaluation of the changes made by all their protagonists, among whom the intellectual-activist is always a minor figure. The emergence of rearguard theories calls for repeated exercises of self-reflexivity about the ongoing untraining and reinvention. The context is similar to St. Augustine's eloquent statement as he was writing his Confessions: Quaestio mihi factus sum ("I have become a question for myself"). The difference is that the question is no longer the confession of past errors but rather participation in the construction of a personal and collective future, without ever being sure that past errors will not be repeated again. (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2014. Epistemologies of the South).

[102] James Scott, for instance, has revealed the existence of a distinct 'little tradition' among the peasantry, constructed through everyday communication, primarily in the medium of 'hidden transcripts' which are concealed from political and intellectual 'leaders' in the wider society (Scott 1977a, 1977b, 1990).
Scholars have revealed through ethnographic and discursive enquiry the operation of horizontal, immanent movements under the very noses of constituted power, across settings ranging from African and Latin American

cannot simply be subjected to superficial political articulation[103]. The quotidian is an exuberant space of already-articulated meanings resistant to peremptory articulation. It does not depend on intrusive formal political agency – a gesture of despotic signification - from 'outside' for meaning.

While Esack's Islamic theopolitical position vehemently promotes 'a universal, inclusivist perspective … and the importance of establishing justice,' (Esack, 1997: 110, 146) it rests almost entirely on a restrictive formal theological dialectics and vanguardist political homiletics which in practice and theory appears to be oblivious and antithetical to the enactive reasoning[104] and semantic communing of everyday struggles and achievements of the disenfranchised. So, despite Esack's populist rhetoric his praxis creates the impression that ordinary folk lack the sophistication to develop and apply an expedient hermeneutic to the entanglements or intertextures of the political, the cultural and the religious they regularly navigate (see footnote 8). While Esack could maintain that, unlike the 'apathetic traditionalists', the content of his arguments support a legitimate political agenda, it should be noted that the form and location of his arguments are pontifical. In addition to exposing Esack's subaltern-undermining peremptory tone[105], it can and will be demonstrated that the enactive reasoning of the subaltern offers a matrix of intuitions his gloss has barely grasped.

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shanty towns to Soviet and American factories. Hecht and Simone (1994: 14–15) provide a series of examples from African societies of horizontal social forms that operate invisibly to inflect, undermine and sometimes overthrow states and formal institutions. The uncontrollability and unpredictability of these movements is the source of their strength.

[103] Esack's theological polemics and political homiletics exemplify this superficial political articulation.

[104] Enactivism sees cognition as a process whereby the issues that are important for the continued existence of the cognitive entity are brought out or enacted: co-determined by the entity as it interacts with the environment in which it is embedded.

[105] I have explained the way God identifies with humanity *(al-nas)* and the relationship between God's path and that of humanity *(al-nas)* (Esack, 1997, 110). The Quran presents a universal, inclusivist perspective of a divine being who responds to the sincerity and commitment of all his servants (Esack, 1997, 146). The reader is referred to page 5 of chapter 2 regarding the cognitive disability of 'the empirical ego' and 'anthropomorphic ontologies'

Esack's final point comprises two parts. First, on the distinction between inclusivist and exclusivist Islam and second, regarding the distinction between his idea of pluralism and the purported liberal notion thereof.

In a rather superficial manner Esack distinguishes between inclusivist and exclusivist Islam by declaring that 'The relationship between the inclusivist form of religion and the exclusivist form can be compared to that of a democratic state and fascist political parties' (Esack, 1997: 175).

Perhaps the basic ideological suggestion of contrasting freedom of choice with socio-political tyranny seems plausible. However, Esack's analogy is indicative of a leitmotif in his general discourse – rhetorical oversimplification. At a very basic level, it could be argued that strictly speaking, comparing a state with a party is logically and theoretically untenable. Another question that can be asked pertains to the democratic state which Esack analogises to his brand of inclusivism. Is it constitutional, representative, participatory, soviet or otherwise?

Also, as Riley (2016: 3) reasons, 'Elected officials in our contemporary oligarchies no more represent the will of the people than did the absolutist monarchs represent the will of God.' Moreover, most modern democratic states embody a strong liberal connotation and are ardent protagonists of capitalism. (More on this in the next chapter.)

He excoriates liberals for equating 'coexistence and freedom with absolute equality for all.' (Esack, 1997: 174). He also instructs that 'inclusivity was not merely a willingness to let every idea and practice exist' (Esack, 1997: 175), 'it was geared towards freeing humankind from injustice and servitude.' (Esack, 1997: 175). One, who determines the limits of inclusivity? And, second, in the absence of an historically clear semantic, syntactic and discursive amplification, the key concepts of his argument (liberation, justice, pluralism, equality) remain

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unarticulated floating signifiers (without a nodal point)[106]. These signifiers were integral to the hegemonic struggle for alternative futures. Without a nodal point and prefigurative praxis, the emotive and polysemic quality of these signifiers are highly problematic. These terms (eventually articulated to the free-market, privatisation, Darwinist individualism and consumerism) were critical to the consolidation of the neoliberal discourse and hegemony in the South African liberation struggle. (Saul, 2015[107]; Bond, 2015; Terreblanche, 2012[108] ; Kasrils, 2013[109]).

In this chapter Esack's rearticulation of pivotal signifiers presents us with an archaeological exercise which demonstrates the inclusivity of the Quranic worldview without compromising the need for historical and personal religious identification. The Quran's commitment to an

[106] A 'nodal point' is a discursive articulation by the intervention of a discursive exterior. Power is the capacity to form 'nodal points' around which social formations are articulated and to make those articulations pervasive, thus achieve hegemony. Hegemonic articulations of elements are not predetermined to enter into one type of arrangement rather than another; they coalesce as a result of an external articulating practice.

[107] Thus, for Kasrils, the ANC/SACP lost its nerve, for Klein, the ANC was "short-sighted", and for Cronin the ANC simply "misread" (for 19 years!) the situation...while waiting, no doubt, for the much discussed second phase of the "national democratic revolution" to kick into action! But surely a more straight-forward explanation in terms of class dynamics is the more potent one: a new class, politically victorious as centered and represented by the ANC, gained power on the back of the liberation struggle broadly defined (a struggle that took place both outside and, principally, inside the country) and used that power in both its own interest and in the interests of global capitalism. Thus veteran ANC/SACP hand and present-day MP Ben Turok can admit that he is driven to "the irresistible conclusion ... that the ANC government has lost a great deal of its earlier focus on the fundamental transformation of the inherited social system".

[108] The ANC government has used the power allotted to it to create a black elite by implementing black empowerment and affirmative action in rather doubtful and myopic ways and plundering the budget recklessly. The perpetuation of white elitism and white corporatism after 1994 and the creation of black elitism over the past 18 years, to the detriment of the poor and unemployed, is the main reason why income has become increasingly unequal since 1994. The richest 10-million South Africans received almost 75% of total income in 2008, whereas the poorest 25-million received less than 8%. (**Neoliberal transition)** South Africa has never had a politico-economic system in which the political side was powerful enough to tame the capitalist side.
Instead of social democracy and an equalisation of income since 1994, South Africa has, over the past 18 years, experienced a United States-led neoliberal transition that has enabled the capitalist-corporatist side to orchestrate even greater inequality in domestic income.

[109]Our Faustian moment came when we took an IMF loan on the eve of our first democratic election. That loan, with strings attached that precluded a radical economic agenda, was considered a necessary evil, as were concessions to keep negotiations on track and take delivery of the promised land for our people. Doubt had come to reign supreme: we believed, wrongly, there was no other option; that we had to be cautious...[In fact, however],**we chickened out.** [emphasis added] The ANC leadership needed to remain true to its commitment of serving the people. This would have given it the hegemony it required not only over the entrenched capitalist class but over emergent elitists, many of whom would seek wealth through black economic empowerment, corrupt practices and selling political influence (Kasrils, ANC member and former Minister in the ANC government).

egalitarian humanism is also fairly cogently evinced. However Esack's approach exudes a certain scholarly indifference and paucity towards 1) the Islamic theosophical legacy in its complex multiplicity, and 2) conscientious coherent conceptual and theoretical substance grown organically from and within the quotidian praxis of the subaltern.

The next chapter undertakes a more rigorous interrogation of Esack's theopolitical vision – rhetoric and calculus.

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Chapter 5

ILT and Politics of 'The People': between the Vertical and the Horizontal

> When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.
> (Ethiopian Proverb)

It should be kept in mind that while this thesis undertakes a rigorous critique of Esack's theopolitical vision, certain considerations are required to temper and nuance the often unduly harsh and unavoidable linguistic edges critical engagement engenders. For instance, when a lacuna is recognised in the thinking of an author, this maybe, for analytical purposes, a consequence of at least two conditions. The subject author's idiosyncratic *parole* (at a point in time) and/or the delimiting *langue* of the archive she works within. The critique operates at three levels. There is the paradigmatic, cultural encyclopaedia or discursive environment that characterise the period within which the subject of critique is enculturated and makes her choices. There is the particular individual's subjective refraction of the dominant and contending paradigms. And, there is the idiosyncratic level, where the personal style and individual reasoning of the subject of critique is manifest. The critique often focuses on the *aporia* and incoherence of the interwoven intertextual arguments of Esack without, given the nature of the text, an explicit demarcation of the levels. For instance, when interrogating his hermeneutics and hermeneutical keys, the critique addresses simultaneously the levels of presentation as follows: the basic logical and semantic formulation of arguments, the implicit and explicit conceptual matrix upon which he relies (relativism, constructivism), and the anomalies insinuated by the larger paradigm within which he is located (rigid binaries; imported, often not organically unfolded[110], liberationist and feminist narratives). The larger

[110] Esack too often simplistically defines progressive politics as that which acknowledges the oppressive link between race, gender, homophobia, arms, and environment. (1997: 240, 248). His arguments do not engage the more substantive radical and liberal positions on political economy, the state, and the processes of transition.

paradigm in this case refers to Esack's predominantly euromodernist orientation, which notwithstanding few vapid reservations, shapes his arguments.

This chapter will provide a critical excavation of Esack's theopolitical vision. For this study, his vision is delineated by two features. The rhetorical aspect and the range of institutional, (ideo)logical and strategic devices which will be referred to as his praxis aspect. . Esack is purportedly concerned about 'the poor' and the structural/systemic nature of their marginalization and immiseration (1997: 17, 67, 250). Yet, throughout his reflections, Esack works with an unstipulated or vaguely implicit social, historical and theological conceptual schema and ontology. He adamantly seems to ignore the many alternative methodological approaches to social ontology such as the reflexive morphogenesis approach or base/superstructure one.

Despite Esack's radical bluster, a restrictive naïve empiricist undertow sustains most of his reflections on transformation/liberation. Indeed, Havel's observation (1985) that,

> Society is a very mysterious animal with many faces and hidden potentialities. It is extremely short-sighted to believe that the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its only true face. None of us knows all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population.

highlights by contrast Esack's disposition to facile rhetoric. Havel's observation resonates well with the central theme of this chapter.

The critique will, primarily, undertake to ascertain whether Esack's theopolitical vision is consistent with the sensibilities and aspirations of subaltern and decolonial studies as schematically positioned herein. Within this analytical framework, it will also deploy certain strategic concepts borrowed from the Deluezian schema and subaltern activists thinking (Cabral, Fanon, Zapatista etc.) which seems helpful in both capturing the nuances of social

activism, often glossed over by the dominant political analysis paradigm, and providing decolonial and subaltern studies with a richer analytical and discursive repertoire.

With this in mind, there will be an interrogation of Esack's explicit and implicit theoretical postulates as well the institutional and pragmatic political calculus through which he articulated and actualised his vision of liberation and transformation.

Social Ontology and Political Praxis

We begin with the consideration of some clues Esack offers pertaining to two central aspects of his theopolitical vision. Social ontology and praxis. First, implicitly on the question of ontology, he (1997: 200 -1) distinguishes between, one, a '**naïve awareness of poverty** [which] leads to a condescending "assistentialism"' and, two, '**solidarity with the poor** in so far as it means attacking structures and making decisions to take concrete actions to help specific classes.' In the political parlance of the period, 1980s – 1990s, the expressions 'structural violence' and 'systemic immiseration/marginalisation' were slogans commonly bandied about. Both expressions were floating signifiers and formed part of the populist resistance rhetoric with multiple quilting points (Africanist, Liberal, Socialist, and Nationalist) and denotations. For some 'structural violence' meant apartheid police and the 'group areas act', for others the latter were merely symptomatic of the particular South African superstructural features reflecting the underlying 'capitalist relations of production'. These expressions were often used without conceptual clarity or an appreciation of their social strategic implications. In Esack's case, neither he nor his political allies ever clarify their social ontology. What kind of structures are they referring to? Are these 'structures' tangible fences, relational habitus, cultural prejudices, a conceptual mode of production and/or a structured combination of several factors? Based on Esack's general indifference towards theoretical coherence and conceptual substance, one is obliged to assume his usage is part of populist

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rhetoric. Apart from the occasional haphazard radical slogan and the obvious racial and patriarchal objections which populate his polemics, Esack appears to offer a very naïve empiricist and simplistic notion of 'social reality'. Such explanations also often vacillate according to the requirements of his subjective and political aspirations and the opportunities he perceives and are able to grasp at that moment (see below). In an interview in 2012 (Villa-Vicencio and Soko, 2012: 216), reflecting on his earlier activism, Esack eventually concedes that 'In the bigger scheme of things, my actions also portray the manner in which religion is often used as a cloak behind which other forces are hidden. In this instance it was manipulated by a political agenda and the pursuit of political power and control.'

The above testimony which clearly discloses his *aporetic* hermeneutic and political expedience, uttered in 2012, might appear to be the reflections of a mature self-reproaching political conscience and spiritual soul. Esack's genealogy prompts the question, is this another sign of *realpolitik*? Can the neoliberal solution in SA be defended? However, this dissertation suggests that Esack's aporetic and expedient thinking have been a definitive characteristic of his instrumentalist theopolitical language game since his image-schemata period. Between 1994 and 1997 Esack (1997: 73) emphatically concludes that 'The hermeneutical task is … a political question … and may suggest a desire to use the text as pretext … I am unconvinced that it can be otherwise or that this is intrinsically objectionable.'

One wonders why he chooses the qualifying phrase 'intrinsically objectionable'. After all, according to his pivotal hermeneutic principle, subjective relativism, there is no intrinsic meaning. All meaning is situation-bound and contextually contrived. Moreover, his attempt to distinguish between 'naïve charity' for and 'solidarity' with the poor is unconvincing. The semantic and ethical difference between the notions of 'asssitentialism' and 'help specific classes' seems in this context to be negligible. Together with the reasons offered above, the statement in question, about 'naïve charity' or 'solidarity', appears as no more than a mere

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token of his rhetorical repertoire rather than an integral concept of political praxis and theory. Here, as elsewhere, Esack, despite his vociferous claims to the contrary, provides a very basic liberal view couched in 'anti liberal' bluster.

Regarding a critical component of praxis, Esack explains that 'solidarity with the oppressed … implies a recognition of them as agents of their liberation with their own resources' (1997, 83 and 201). This proposition superficially resonates favourably with the other more durable and proven subaltern projects where, for instance the Zapatista utilise the slogan "*mandar obedeciendo*," which might be translated as "lead by obeying the voice and wishes of those whom one is leading." Or where Cape Verde activists (Chabal, 2007: 107-17) created alternative social formations and experiments in the 'liberated zones'. Regrettably, because of Esack's patchwork discourse, the following question demands scrutiny, is Esack's proposition an expression of his rhetorical cunning (Esack, 1997, 4) or a substantive enunciation of principle and praxis?

The scrutiny process, by considering related statements elsewhere in the book, including references to practical features, will attempt to ascertain whether this remark forms part of a thematic or rhetoric ornamentation. First, Esack supports the idea of 'a group of people …entrusted with the responsibility … of managing society.' (1997: 89). He then boldly declares that 'Very little of this progressive theology [presumably referring to his 'progressive theology'] was ever really embraced by the clerics or the community at large' (1997: 250). Secondly, he describes a situation of 'the masses cheering while their liberators are being fed to the lions' (1997:250), which is a reference to the following predicament. 'The growing distance between progressive Islamists and ordinary Muslims' (1997: 259). Besides, he accedes, progressive Islam's 'lapse into a middle class discourse entirely unconnected to the concerns of the poor' (1997: 17, 250). How does this alienation, if not antagonism, between the 'progressive' and ordinary occur? Whence 'this progressive theology', and who are these

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'liberators', 'entrusted managers', and rapidly recanting 'progressive Islamists'? Apart from their pamphleteering and electioneering histrionics (Esack, 1997: 234), where are they socially and politically actually located and sustained? Here is clear evidence of 1) Esack's partisan political optics and historiography undermining itself, and 2) his generally syncretistic opportune social and political logic. We know Esack's provenance and genealogy - harsh uncompromising indigence, and an enactive[111] pragmatic cunning (1997: 4). But, his later active political trajectory which historically and ideologically slot neatly into the populist spectacle category of politics, is far removed from that original context. Instead of an organic subaltern praxis, these inconsistencies, notwithstanding his nostalgic anecdotes, affirm the vertical elitist nature of his principal political calculus. He confirms his alienated verticality when, in trying to explain popular disaffection with his brand of ILT, he cites 'the loss of charismatic leadership figures' (1997: 236). This analytic jars with, elsewhere espoused, 'Liberation theology [which pursues] its objectives through a process which is participatory … in solidarity with those whose … liberation it seeks' (1997: 83). This frail *explanans* together with the lament that a number of [our] leadership figures were being lost to government (ibid. 235) and his own worsening political estrangement and isolation due to 'incompatible understandings of organizational accountability' (ibid. 235) underscore the contrast between an 'spectacle demagogic' and ' organic pre-figurative participatory' political praxis. Esack's praxis is indubitably a bedevilled version of the former.

Indeed, he concedes as much, when, in a moment of uncertain conscience, he cites Boff (1983: 4) who asks, 'what praxis will **actually** and **not seemingly** help?'

This conclusion is further reinforced, when we note that most of Esack's theopolitical polemics (large portion of his book) is directed at the discursive legacy, as he constructs it, of the

[111] Enactive learning is learning by doing and experiencing the consequences of your actions, which provide information.

'conservative', 'accommodationist', 'traditional' theocracy. Given his purported concern for the margins and the oppressed, one has to ask why Esack's voice is the preponderant one and where are the voices and evidence of his dialogue with, not merely his presumed representation, of the marginalised?

South Africa, 1980s – 1990s: Political and Discursive Shifts and Swings under the Hegemony of the ANC

In the wake of the surging social ferment of the 70s expressed through numerous emergent popular repertoires and initiatives, in the domains of education, economy, culture and society, many of the ossified leftist and other opposition discourses were being drastically destabilised by their own theoretical, organizational and political disjunctures (Glaser, 1998; Saul, 2014; Marais, 2011). The correlation between their rhetoric and the swirling social reality was accelerating towards zero. For instance, a striking feature of the period which evolved as a serious alternative to the dominant 'statist' and 'vanguardist' thinking of the time was the unfolding of a 'councillist discourse'. While 'statist' and 'vanguardist' notions favoured the ANC's political project, councillism was an approach which emphasised strong workplace and neighbourhood self-government. It was

> …viewed potentially as the foundation of a system of higher tier political representation through instructed delegation and instant recall from below. Councillism is linked to the view that future socialist democracy can be prefigured on the ground by effective democratic self-government (Glaser, 1998: 35)

While the councillist movement had to contend with many challenges, its growth attests to the existence of more vernacular[112] and organic subaltern initiatives in South Africa of the 1980s

[112] Vernacular values are intuitive knowledges and practical know-how that structure everyday culture; they pivot not so much—as Gramsci says—on common sense as on "good sense". They're reasonable intuitions and intuitive reason: words, habits and understandings that inform real social life—the real social life of a non-expert population. Illich (1973) reminds us that "vernacular" stems from the Latin *vernaculam*, meaning "homebred" or "homegrown," something "homemade." The vernacular domain, as Illich observes, is the realm of everyday life in which people create and negotiate their own sense of things – how they should educate themselves, how they should embrace their spirituality, how they should manage the resources they need and love. Vernacular culture

– 1990s which resonate with the 'Pedagogy of Liberation' experiments in the 'liberated zones' of the PAIGC[113] (Chabal, 2003; Chilcote, 1999; Da Silva, 2009) and the Zapatistas' creation and maintenance of the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Councils of Good Government/CGG). The CGG methodology conceptualises transformation as that which is consequent and immanent to a careful labour of

> …evental prefiguration, connection and condensation that brings together what seemed to be inexistent and invisible elements within the arrangement into a new existence and visibility. This process of revolutionary intervention brings into existence a new world of the present, not as a consequence of the past, or as the potential for a new future 'to come', but through the construction of a new present in a future anterior that 'will have been'. (Nail, 2012: 80-1)

The argument here associated with 'councillism', Zapatista, the post- anarchists and the 'pedagogy of liberation' praxis is that the strategy of prefiguration is able to provide an alternative to the transformative methods posed by opposition and insurrection. Esack's statist and vanguardist approach is clearly discordant with such vernacular initiatives and praxis, as this chapter thematically contends and demonstrates. What factors occasioned the demise of these subaltern initiatives in SA?

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The Ascendency of the ANC and the Neoliberal Paradigm

A significant and emblematic trend of the period , 80s – 90s, was the fairly rapid, albeit uneven and complex, process through which the radical and progressive theoretical paradigms, visions, scenarios and policy recommendations developed by sympathetic academics and activists, in organic dialogue with social and political movements, disintegrated. This calamitous and perfidious intellectual and ethical regressive aberration was most conspicuous within the

consists of those spaces that exist for self-determination in the broadest sense of the term. (Bollier: 2011)

[113] PAIGC (African Party of Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) was conceived as a Pan- African instrument against imperialism in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. It later formed a larger Pan-African instrument, called Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (or CONCP) (including MPLA, FRELIMO, MLSTP) as an instrument against Portuguese imperialism and its NATO allies, but more importantly part of a Pan-African struggle to rid Africa and Africans of all forms of imperialism including neo-colonialism.

discourse of political economy. We dwell for a while on the deterioration of the political economy discourse because it often serves as a definitive signifier of the various resistance and transformation narratives. Padayachee's (2011: 13) description of trends in economic thinking, over this period helps, *mutatis mutandis*, to elucidate the broader parallel degeneration of theory and activism in the South African liberatory discourse.

> From Neo-Marxism and the pursuit of a socialist alternative in the mid-to late 1980s, to an essentially social democratic version of Regulation Theory by 1990, to MERG's 1993 post-Keynesian approach which championed a major developmental role for the democratic state, to the ISP's mid-1990s corporatist strategy and post-Fordist vision of global competitiveness, and finally, in and through the RDP (WP)[114] and GEAR, to neoliberalism. All this, in the remarkably short time span of a decade.

The relational tremor between 'progressive academic economists' and social movements in South Africa coincided with a global political and intellectual swing to the Right, a trend which began in the UK and US in the late 1970s and gathered momentum in the wake of the collapse of Soviet and eastern European style socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Washington Consensus, the belief that 'free markets and sound money are the key to economic development' (Krugman in Bell, 1997:84; Stiglitz, 2008) and that there is no alternative to this approach in contemporary conditions, was the hegemonic view that was powerfully propagated in South Africa after 1990 by the IMF and the World Bank, with differing degrees of tact and diplomacy. Many progressive economists succumbed to the Washington Consensus all too easily. Part of the reason for this capitulation lies in the relative intellectual weakness of this seemingly progressive community of academics and economists (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996; Padayachee, 2011). Moreover, argues Padayachee (2011), 'coupled with relative isolation, the absence of a rigorous debating tradition, bitter personality conflicts and power struggles left

[114] RDP - The RDP is an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework. It seeks to mobilise all our people and our country's resources toward the final eradication of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future. (Mandela Centre of Memory, 1994). (WP) – Working Paper. The Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy was introduced by the SA government in 1996 as a macroeconomic policy framework. This policy was widely criticised especially by Congress of South Africa's Trade Unions (COSATU) for its neo-liberal approach. (Marais, 2001), (Harsch, 2001), (Visser, 2004)

them vulnerable to the neo-liberal juggernaut, when these right-wing ideas, backed by powerful, global institutions and resources, entered South Africa in a big way after 1990.'

The ascendency of the ANC's broad social and political leadership in the 1990s had several ramifications. Civil society organizations were emasculated and/or relegated (Krog, 2003; Saul, 2014; Marais, 2011; Glaser, 1998). This meant that the concerns and aspirations of the disenfranchised masses was no longer heard but purportedly represented by 'centrist' and, increasingly professional, 'vanguardest' politicians. Organizations such as COSATU, the SACP and SANCO also tamely capitulated. This marked the dramatic consolidation of vertical politics and the deliberate relegation of the 'poor' from the transformation process. One of the consequences of these developments was that many progressive academics and economists lost direct touch with the dynamic and more radical traditions of these mass-based labour and social movements. Progressive academics and economists found themselves relating more and more to the ANC's elite leadership, whose concerns and agendas were increasingly being set by conservative forces and institutions. They followed the current into what Neocosmos (1997, 53) refers to as the 'corporatist statism' of the 1990s. Many, like Esack as his role in the 1990s clearly illustrates, conform to Mamdani's (1992, 1996) characterisation of African intellectuals as 'state fetishists' (Neocosmos, 1997:53)

Whatever else was happening within the Congress movement, it was the ANC leadership's slide into neo-liberalism, most noticeable from around early1993, (Kasrils, 2013; Ashman, Fine and Newman, 2011; Saul, 2014) which arguably made the most dramatic impact on the decisions and choices of South Africa's ostensibly progressive academic and economist communities.

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Said (1994), referring to Benda's jeremiad against the betrayal of the intellectuals, observes that, although writing as early as 1927, Benda had sensed how important it was for governments to have

> as their servants those intellectuals who could be called on not to lead, but to consolidate the government's policy, to spew out propaganda against official enemies, euphemisms and, on a larger scale whole systems of Orwellian Newspeak, which could disguise the truth of what was occurring in the name of institutional "expediency" or "national honour" (1994:5-6).

A similar point was made by Paul Johnson, who avers that intellectuals 'far from being highly individualist and non-conformist people, follow certain regular patterns of behaviour…they are often ultra-conformist within the circles formed by those whose approval they seek and value (1988:342). 'Progressive Islamists', in this period, as described by Esack (1997: 234-6), were clearly zealous passengers on the same train as all the other careerist apparatchiks of the time.

Historiography - From Confusion to Collusion – From Liberative Aporetics to Statist Apologetics

From 'a commitment to the destruction of oppression and aggression and the establishment of justice' (Esack, 1997: 106) and the conviction that 'theology for the marginalised is reflection which follows on praxis for liberation' (1997: 85) to a somewhat domesticated 'my contribution to the poor [now] is through Islamic theological debate' (Esack, 2012: 218), Esack's theopolitical journey, on the one hand, mirrors and echoes the discursive and historical ascendency of neoliberalism under the ANC in SA while on the other it also narrates the mournful story of subaltern capitulation.[115]

[115] Indeed, Fanon opens 'Trials and tribulations' with a clear warning that 'history teaches us' that the anticolonial struggle 'is not written from a nationalist perspective'. In other words the demand for nationhood often becomes an empty shell because of the 'apathy'*or as Farrington puts it 'laziness'* and cowardice of the elite and intelligentsia, their lack of commitment to the national project, and the lack of real connection between them and the masses (RP, p. 97; CF, p. 148). Bhabha flattens this critique to the 'indecision and uncertainty' of the colonized (read nationalist middle class) that results from privileging of the 'nervous conditions' and guilt complexes created by colonialism. Indeed Bhabha goes as far as to collapse the anti-colonial fighter with the nationalist middle class arguing that 'The mujahid ... caught ''in the tightly-knit web of colonialism'' [is] psychically split and politically paralyzed' (p. xxxix). Consequently Bhabha collapses Fanon's crucial differentiations between the nationalist

Despite his many unsubstantiated harangues against liberals, when it suits him Esack, using simplistic binaries, unctuously defends the 'liberal democratic state' of the ANC (Esack, 1997: 227-8). This is unsurprising, but particularly flagrant and revealing in his comments against the popular, albeit abstruse and tumultuous, peoples initiative known as People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD[116]) (ibid. 224-30). Although Esack's public spiel on PAGAD typically equivocates, the thrust of his criticisms dismisses the PAGAD initiative pejoratively and simplistically in the language of the ANC state (Tayob, 1996; CSVR 2001). Esack's statist notion of politics and his ideological (non-subaltern) partiality is blatant in the following contrasting positions. In one section (1997: 104-5) of his book he insists that the Quran imposes an obligation on the faithful to challenge oppression and injustice until they are eliminated and that the awesome power of iron should be used in this cause. Based on this and several other statements of pre-1994 bravado, it can be inferred that he is strongly urging a violent form of militarist struggle against oppression. In another section (1997: 226-8) referring to a large popular resistance initiative, comprising a strong Islamic presence, from which he was ideologically and politically estranged, he claims the Quran would disapprove of their methods because they enjoy the privileges of a liberal democratic society. Indeed, he derides their notion of people's justice (1997: 227). The argument here is not to condone random arbitrary acts of violent social discipline and retribution but to highlight Esack's persistent theoretical inconsistencies and flagrant partisan political logic. He superciliously opines 'the group [PAGAD] appeared … buried under the wave of emotionalism and … essentialist … notions

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middle class, the militants, and the peasant and lumpenproletarian masses whose experiences of colonialism and after, are quite different. (Gibson, 2007: 88)

[116] PAGAD originated in a network of hitherto, 1995, disparate and isolated anti-drug, anti-crime groups and neighbourhood watches frustrated by their inability to tackle problems whose roots extended far beyond their individual localities. Predominantly, but by no means exclusively Muslim, PAGAD began with a loose organisational structure and an informal, collective style of leadership. It was open to approaches from other anti-crime groups and prepared at least to consider working with the police. Many of the more violent actions taken against drug dealers, such as the attack on Rashaad Staggie in August 1996, were neither planned nor formally sanctioned by the organisation as a whole. (Dixon and Johns, 2001), Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

of an ahistorical truth encapsulated in an Islam which consistently defies intellectual scrutiny' (ibid. 227).

Let us contrast Esack's 'state fetishism' with two equally credible voices of the South African and global subaltern struggle. Before that, it would be helpful to keep in mind a diachronic (Mbeki, 1984 and Fanon, 1967) and synchronic (Alexander, 2000) framing of the context of rhetoric and struggle. Although Esack and his 'progressive Islamist' allies are glaringly vociferous in their denunciation of racism and patriarchy, the latter particularly often uncritically imported from the global north (1997, 231-2, 240), they are, barring the occasional oratorical bluster about 'Empire', conspicuously reticent on alternative anti-capitalist political economy and the more searching questions of liberation and transformation. This is arguably related to facts such as 1) vertical petty bourgeoisie anti-apartheid political activism was generally myopic and often impelled by the promise of apparatchik privileges in the new government (see Esack's own admission above) and 2) a point not unrelated to the first, Thabo Mbeki's forceful declaration in 1984 that 'The ANC is not a socialist party. It has never pretended to be one, it has never said it was, and it is not trying to be. It will not become one by decree or for the purpose of pleasing its "left" critics.' Furthermore, several political historians and economists (see earlier section) agree (Gevisser, 2009; Saul, 2014; Smith and Tromp, 2009; Padayachee, 2011) that by the late 1980s, Thabo Mbeki and his internal ANC allies were perfectly prepared to seal a deal, unthreatening and certainly non-socialist, with capital – while insidiously outflanking Chris Hani and other potential left critics within the movement in doing so. With this frame set, we can juxtapose Esack's ANC political apologetics in defence of an elitist liberal democracy (Bond, 2000) with the following quotes and thus gain a clearer grasp of his flittering praxis and rhetoric.

Frantz Fanon (1967: 48) reminds us that

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> …if the masses, without waiting for the chairs to be arranged around the baize table, listen to their own voice and begin committing outrages and setting fire to buildings, the elites and the bourgeois parties will be seen running to the colonialists to exclaim "this is very serious! We do not know how it will end; we must find a solution–some sort of compromise".

Neville Alexander (d. 2102), Robben Island detainee, respected academic and stalwart of the South African liberation struggle, referring to the ANC government (2002: 78) woefully observes that the post-apartheid state is, without qualification, a capitalist state; indeed

> to believe on the basis of some kind of populist abracadabra, as many of the ideologues of the Congress Alliance do, that [the ANC] government is purely and simply "our" government, that is, the government of the working people, or even the government of the people, is wishful thinking or irresponsible propaganda.

Analytical tools and concepts

It is apparent that the pivotal signifiers that orchestrate the archives from which Esack fashions his theopolitical praxis and discourse are hegemony, representation, the state, and the vanguard.

Within the orthodox 'statist' paradigm of the era (1980s and 1990s), the vanguard is entrusted and expected to establish ideological hegemony (or counter-hegemony) and capture state power. As a hegemonic enterprise, the vertical organizational and ideological premises often, following a linear regimented logic, engender and impose a unified perspective which tends to relegate difference and multiplicity.

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Historically and theoretically (Piven and Cloward, Fantasia 1988; Scott 1992; Hecht and Simone 1994), it can be evinced that the organisational hierarchy resulting from the locus and logic of vanguardist representational politics is a deleterious for movements of resistance. There are several reasons. Firstly, it concentrates power in the hands of an elite who are able to use the movement to their own personal and political advantage, should a division emerge between themselves and the mass. Capitalist axiomatics is well-structured to facilitate the co-option of such elites into structures such as parliamentary politics and the media 'celebrity'

circuit (desertion of the dissembling 'charismatic leaders' of the Call of Islam). Arborescent/vertical organisations tend to draw activities away from the grassroots base and into a combination of regular, formalised meetings, lobbying within the political system and set-piece actions arranged by the central leadership (Call of Islam, 1997: 234-6, 250). Piven and Cloward clearly demonstrate this argument in relation to a number of social movements, showing how trade unions, civil rights protesters and unemployed groups, among others, were misled by the fallacy of hierarchic organisation into tactics which weakened their ability to capitalise on their necessarily located and territorial potentials (Piven and Cloward 1988). The party is a government in waiting. As such it mirrors the apparatus of the state itself. It is hierarchical (leaders/cadres/masses), based on a division of labour and a teleological notion of effectivity – the rationale of the party is capturing power. It thus becomes in itself a Leviathan, an alienating power which reproduces amongst its mass membership the same subordination which exists in the wider society.

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Towards a theory of a subaltern liberative praxis

The concept "everyday" in everyday resistance is necessary to understand in contrast to the extraordinary or, according to Bhabha (1994: 93-101): the "spectacular". Bhabha calls hidden resistance "sly civility", which he differentiates from "spectacular resistance". Everyday resistance becomes the silent, mundane and ordinary acts that are normalized. Therefore, actors themselves are not necessarily or consciously regarding it as "resistance" at all. Rather, it forms a normal part and way of their life, personality, culture and tradition. Certain categories are helpful in thinking about everyday resistance; coping, survival-technique, accommodation or avoidance/escape. It is often suggested that coping, survival, accommodation or resistance are not either-or choices, but often expressed as combinations. According to Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2013) the heterogenic and contingent practice of everyday resistance is

– due to its entanglement with and intersectional relation to power – discursively articulated by actors, targets and observers, sometimes as "resistance", and sometimes not.

Magnusson (1996, 2003) suggests thinking of political spaces as those where people no longer agree on who should govern, where established routines, procedures and practices are put into question. Politics, on this reading, is not topographical: there is no 'interiority' where politics happens, with an 'outside' social life. Social movements highlight the ways in which practices, procedures and problems are continually being made political by challenging accepted behaviours and practices. Detached from its Statist presuppositions, this notion of politics helps to foreground the problem of the ways in which quotidian social movements unfurl as unified entities and the ways in which this unity is interrogated and elaborated.

Understandably, the subaltern paradigm introduces itself by first decentring 'the state' and thereby disrupting the matrix of conventional political categories. A logic of horizontal *and anti-representational* political action (present in, amongst other, traditions such as the liberatory pedagogies of the PAIGC, councillism in South Africa, Zapatista, the Dalits in India, and Situationism) stems from the critique of representation both as a mechanism for the articulation of needs and preferences and as a basis for thinking about how other worlds might be thought about and created. This new political calculus requires a critique of the three elements of representation upon which a vertical politics relies: a) the idea of the programme as 'representative' of people's needs and interests; b) the idea of the party as that which represents or embodies the revolutionary project and thus political rationality; and c) the idea of the state (or transitionary authority, as embodiment of macro-power) as the representative of the collective post-capitalist project.

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It has been noted that representation is based on 'speaking for' – speaking for 'us', 'everyone', the oppressed, the majority, the working class, the black community. It is constructed from the point of view of a static molar (see below) subject which Deleuze and Guattari term a 'denumerable' set (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 [1980], 470). This is a set or group that conforms to the logic of molar identities, identities which are constructed *for* people, rather than *by* people. A classic denumerable set in political rhetoric is 'the majority', as in 'the majority are in favour of cracking down on delinquents'. 'The party speaks for the working class'; 'the people of the developing world want more development'; 'the black community wants to integrate into society'. As opposed to, say, the annual congress mechanism of 'democratic centralism' designed to create a line to which everyone will adhere, many activists, particularly 'horizontals', have invested so heavily in the social forum process because they see the forums as providing such spaces – spaces of discussion, of comparison, of shared pedagogies, of affinity and affiliation.

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Related to the axiomatics of horizontal anti-representational politics is the metaphor of a rhizome. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 3-25) the rhizome represents non-linear continuity and fuzzy aggregates that are interlinked or interwoven but on the basis of horizontal or transversal connection as opposed to the stasis of arborescent/vertical structures with their segmentarities and hierarchies. The resistance of rhizomatic movements exceeds and overflows this representationality. In the rhizomatic imagination one can understand Crisso and Odoteo's description of how the minorities become the 'new barbarians' (in SA we have, for instance the shackdwellers, landless, poor peoples', and fees must fall movements), unable to speak the language of the new imperialism of global capitalism, and for this reason always a threat at the gates of the citadels (Crisso and Odoteo 2003).

In the political calculus of Esack's 'progressive Islam', despite the perfunctory gestures and rhetoric about 'a process that is participatory' (1997: 83) and 'solidarity with the oppressed' (1997: 201), in practice he has had to submit to the facts that 'there was a growing distance between progressive Islamists and ordinary Muslims' (1997: 250), 'the presence and influence of [progressive Islamists] have been in decline since the unbanning of the liberation movements'(1997: 234), 'and in the case of the Call, their programmes hardly ever went beyond dressing up ANC policy and negotiating tactics in Quranic wrapping' (1997: 234), the Call unreservedly called for an ANC[neoliberal] vote (1997: 218). Esack and his comrades were evidently more entranced by the lure of elitist spectacle politics than the everyday praxis of the subaltern. As he expresses it, increasingly his political calculus succumbed to 'middle class discourse entirely unconnected to the concerns of the poor' (1997: 250).

Rethinking praxis: exploding the axiomatics of verticality and representation

This section will offer a brief insight into two additional theoretical devices germane to the emerging subaltern rhizomatic discourse. One, addresses the necessary transition from the universal/particular (U/P) notion of hegemony to the molar/molecular (M/M) variation. Two, constructivist revolutionary consistency. These devices can be viewed as part of an ensemble of ways of un-thinking the legacy of (rigid) binary, arborescent capitalist axiomatics[117].

The U/P conception of hegemony, operating under a rigid binary is limited, insofar as it forces politics into a choice between hegemonic fixation and/or periodic subversion. As Laclau puts it, 'the hegemonic relation requires the production of tendentially empty signifiers which, while

[117] The axiomatic of capitalism consists of several basic axioms: isomorphy (states and various state formations are models of the realization of its axiomatic), the axiom of addition/subtraction whereby the axiomatic keeps adding further axioms, which is also the essence of the capitalist axiomatic and the essence of the issue of inventing new forms of living, the axiom of saturation (an immanent axiomatic always faces its own limit, which is, on the other hand, always pushed away by inventing new territories), the axiom of power (the axiomatic possesses more power than its elements, which constitute its models), the axiom of the included middle (the unequal exchange of fluxes), the axiom of denumerability (the quantification of fluxes), and the axiom of undecidable statements (the potentiality for non-denumerability within the axiomatic itself). (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 509–522)

maintaining the incommensurability between universals and particulars, enable the latter to take up the representation of the' (2000: 142).

Within its wider semantic environment, in addition to the rigid binaries, hegemony also mobilises and depends on the metaphors of verticality, statism and vanguardism. Several activist scholars directly or indirectly (Cabral, Cesaire, Zapatista, Nail, Negri and Hardt) suggest that a M/M approach to hegemony sublates the rigid binary and allows for a richer suppler concept. Montgomery (2007: 45) defines the M/M as follows:

> Put most simply, processes of molarization establish practices and concepts that minimize variation, regulating connections, movements, and change so that it is predictable and stable. Processes of molecularization (used interchangeably with singularization) are processes where the boundaries, habits, routines and concepts that keep things stable are destabilized, allowing open-ended unpredictable change to occur.

The M/M distinction is not a rigid binary[118]. Instead, it helps us to transcend the U/P binary. The molar and molecular distinction is a dynamic and relational dualism. Rather than dividing the world into two sides, the molar/molecular distinction asks us to think the world in terms of processes which are immanent to one another. May (2005: 127) explains that '… molar segmented lines produce given identities with recognizable borders. Molecular quantum flows imply fluid identities that arise from a chaotic and often unpredictable folding, unfolding, and refolding of matter. Micropolitics is not an issue of the small; it is an issue of quantum flows.'

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[118] On the question of segmentation, the following approach is favoured. Three forms and two types are mooted; binary, circular and linear forms combined with supple and rigid types. Whereas binary supple segmentations are defined by multiple binaries that are always determined by a third (an alliance between the two), binary rigid segmentations are self-sufficient and assure the prevalence of one segment over the other (hierarchy). Whereas circular supple segments do not imply the same centre but a multiplicity of centres (round but not quite circular), circular rigid segments form a resonance of concentric circles around an axis of rotation, converging on a single point of accumulation. Whereas linear supple segmentation functions by 'segments-in-progress', alignments but no straight line, and supple morphological formations, linear rigid segments function by homogenised segments geometrically organised around a dominant segment through which they pass: a space or spatio rather than a place or territory. (Nail, 2012)

We should be cautious to not reify molar and molecular into unyielding categories, or imply that they are elements of the world that need to be represented with linear precision. It would be more constructive to think of them as tactical devices that enable new modes of thought.

Constructivist revolutionary consistency, is rhizomatically expressed as neither utopian programme, the effect of social constructs, the capture of state power, an evolutionary development or the potentiality for revolutionary change as such, but rather the committed arrangement and distribution of heterogeneous elements or singularities without vanguard, party, state or capital: it is prefigurative politics based on autonomy and the self-management of political problems (see Deleuze, 1994: 206/108; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 588/471). It is a regional or local composition open to further changes as they are added, one at a time, around a common cause. (Nail, 2012)

A horizontal world is, as Zapatista says, a world of 'many worlds'; but what makes many worlds possible is the delight and celebration of autonomy from those who speak for others. It is a world beyond representatives, fixed and known identities, obligations and duties that others erect for us and call 'transcendental'

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Esack's claims and purported principles.

On popular participation: 'liberation theology *tries* to achieve its objectives through a process that is participatory and liberatory (1997: 83). 'Solidarity with the oppressed *implies* a recognition of them as agents of their liberation' (1997: 201). 'Progressive Islam in the 1980s was manifested on the streets, in townships, in church halls, mosques and in a plethora of organizations' (1997: 250). The analytical or mere verbal meanings suggested by the preceding quotes are relatively plain. It should be asked, what is the performative history and significance thereof? Regarding the 1980s, two notes should be considered. First, 'progressive Islam' is not specified politically and/or conceptually, and there were several versions. Hence, which

variation of Islam were the streets hosting? Second, as the following descriptions imply Esack's notion of 'progressive Islam' is unclear. It often appears as a mere mishmash of radical sounding populist slogans which in practice had little or no organic link to the margins (Esack, 1997: 17, 250). To illustrate, Esack affirms the latter thesis when he obliges as follows: 'very little of this progressive theology was ever really embraced by the clerics or the community at large' (1997: 250). 'How connected to ordinary women and their concerns are these progressive Muslims?' (1997:250). 'Will this be another case of the masses cheering while their liberators are fed to the lions?' (1997: 250). In addition to the glaring ambiguities about 'progressive Islamists' Esack clearly also acknowledges that 'there was a growing distance between progressive Islamists and ordinary Muslims' (1997: 250).

Furthermore, during and after the apotheosis and exhilaration of the politics of spectacle and the impassioned populist campaigns, Esack informs us that his praxis and that of his co-conspirators 'hardly ever went beyond dressing up ANC policy and negotiating tactics in Quranic wrapping' (1997: 234). In this period also, Esack notes, 'ongoing reflections on the Quran - communitarian exegesis – and the emphasis on the personal growth of the engaged interpreter which characterised [their] work before the unbanning of the liberation movement were missing' (1997: 235). Their political calculus succumbed to 'middle class discourse entirely unconnected to the concerns of the poor' (1997: 250). Unsurprisingly, therefor '[progressive Islamists also] "lost" a number of leadership figures to government' (1997: 235). The era also witnessed the diminishing presence of progressive Islam which Esack, rather euphemistically, maintains can be attributed to, 'the loss of charismatic leadership' (1997: 236). The alienation and multiple personal agendas that plague these statist verticalist organizations also resulted in Esack himself resigning 'as coordinator of the Call of Islam 1990 … after a series of rather bruising encounters over, amongst other matters "incompatible understandings of organizational accountability"' (1997: 236).

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Where are those who 'lead by asking and obeying', the values, principles and practices of the embryonic councillist movements, and the rich everyday-engendered astute meanings and insights of the ordinary. If, indeed, Esack and his comrades were organically located within and amongst the margins the travesty portrayed above would have, in all likelihood, been averted.

Put into perspective, the dramatic and rapid estrangement of 'Esack and his progressive Islamists' from 'ordinary Muslims and the subaltern generally' almost immediately after the unbanning of the broad resistance movement, raises serious questions about their personal calculus and organizational praxes. Distinct from the molecular, horizontal, prefigurative and genuinely participatory vernacular praxes of ordinary people, Esack, clearly succumbing to the individualistic, vanguardist statist and capitalist axiomatics of the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa, offers a needed albeit tremulous aporetic contribution to the liberatory quest and dialogue.

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Hermeneutics

While the main thrust of this chapter focuses on Esack's theopolitical vision, it includes a short note on his hermeneutics. The reason for this is to suggest a correlation between his *aporetic* hermeneutics and political 'pragmatism'/expedience.

The question of subjectivity

Esack repeatedly accentuates the preponderance of 'the subjective' and 'the context or situation of reception' in constructing meaning and interpreting a text. Both these ideas function in conjunction with an implicit unqualified relativism and constructivism. In the absence of a delineated social and psychological ontology, it is never clear 'what' is relative to 'what' and

who constructs what is relevant and by what means. Acknowledging the problem of infinite regress associated with an unqualified relativism, Esack attempts closure by claiming to be acting in the interests of the margins. But, there is no evidence of 1) the margins direct and deliberate participation in his formulations, 2) how he manages the differential nature of the aspirations and concerns of subaltern communities, 3) how is he able to ensure an authentic representation of 1).

On the question of subjectivity, how are we expected to apprehend Esack's usage? Apart from references to 'personal baggage and experience' (1997, 19, 12, 50-1) Esack offers no credible, testable conceptual schema. Esack does not distinguish between subjectivity, individuality, self, and/or identity. Neither, does he *systematically* address the interwoven questions of enculturation, agency and structure, *langue* and *parole*, *habitus* and reflexivity nor the role language plays in the formation of self, other, object, and knowledge? Instead of Esack's lame allusion to 'baggage', Mansfield's (2000: 3) basic description provokes a more creative and dynamic mode of thinking about subjectivity when he explains that 'Etymologically, to be subject means to be 'placed (or even thrown) under'. One is always subject to or of something. The word subject, therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles.'

Esack's position is further clouded by his reluctance or inability to escape or account for 'rigid binary' thinking. Surprisingly, Esack doesn't seem to recognise how this rigid binary would also compromise a veritable pluralism (also see Lyotard on pluralism and the *differend*). Throughout his writing Esack's hermeneutical project appears capricious, often subject to his political agenda and hence open to opportunism. In his hermeneutics, as in his politics, Esack is recidivist in eschewing the responsibility of proceeding from a position of theoretical and

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conceptual integrity subaltern consultation. Indeed, based on his surface and silent text, Esack insinuates the discredited liberal idealist notion which celebrates abstract subjectivity as an expression of human autonomy and free will (1997, 10, 12, 50-1). This, in turn, suggests that both, in his methodology and ontology, Esack embodies and espouses a form of hedonistic liberal individualism. For instance, a typical illustration of this methodological hedonism is observed when Esack is 'occasioned' to resign 'as National Co-ordinator of the Call of Islam and from the organization itself, after a series of rather bruising encounters over, amongst other matters, "incompatible understandings of organizational accountability"' (1997: 236). The point emblematic of the fact that Esack's hermeneutics is far too facile and theopolitically highly problematic.

It will be instructive to contrast Esack's nebulous meanderings with Stuart Hall's methodological genealogy of 'subjectivity' (Hall: MS, 1987; CID, 1990), without having to agree with all the details of Hall's approach. For Hall, the self is internally fragmented, incomplete, multiple and is produced and positioned – that is subjected to and determined within – discourse. This decentred view of identity provoked by postmodernism and part of a broader twentieth-century debate underpins much of Hall's writings in the 1980s and 1990s. In traversing the plateau of this conversation, Hall usually maps it in terms of five representative figures: Karl Marx (who described ideology as 'false consciousness'); Sigmund Freud (who exposed the workings of the unconscious); Ferdinand Saussure (who implied we are 'spoken by' language); Jacques Lacan (who revealed how identity is premised upon misrecognition and absence) and Michel Foucault (who viewed the self as both the subject of, and subjected to, discourse). Having demarcated the concept Hall also offers three dynamic principles with which to think about 'subjectivity'. These are difference/*differance*, self-reflexivity and

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contingency[119]. Given an insufficiently workable and sophisticated concept of subjectivity and related concepts, and Esack's individualistic insinuations and proclivities, his ruminations on hermeneutics are susceptible to the following charges.

1) Robbins' (2005: 120) question about whether 'The interpreter seeks to engage in heteronomous responsibility rather than autonomous freedom, in intersubjective exploration rather than egological imposition',

2) Tamdgidi's (2013, xviii) admonition that when we say 'I think, the "I" that thinks is not a singular entity, as the Western "universalist" philosophy amid an individualistic culture proclaims, but is multiple'. And

3) Madison's (1994, 250) reminder that Gadamer 'defends himself against the charge of subjectivism by maintaining that interpretation is never—indeed, can never be—the act of an isolated, monadic subject, for the subject's own self-understanding. It is inevitably a function of the historical tradition to which he or she belongs.'

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Text and Context

The relationship between texts and context is easy to acknowledge but far more difficult to conceptualise and utilise as a hermeneutical tool. Here I will only raise a few basic questions addressed specifically to Esack's insistence on the overwhelming influence of context in deriving meaning from scripture.

One, we consider the verse 13:11 of the Quran which reads

[119] The politics of **difference/*differance*** involves a recognition of the 'many' within the 'one' and a rejection of clear-cut binary oppositions that rigidly divide diverse communities into discrete unities: black/ white, straight/gay, male/female. Differences are no longer externalised, but internal to identities (both group and 'individual'). **Self-reflexivity** involves foregrounding the specificity of the position from which we speak: we can no longer assume a natural, universal speaking position in this context. **Contingency** involves a sense of dependency on other events or contexts, of recognising the political positions we take up are not set in stone that we may need to re-position ourselves over time and in different circumstances. If the women's liberation movement was a progressive movement within one set of circumstances (see above), it was also a regressive movement within another.

Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.

How will Esack reconcile this Quranic verse with his hermeneutic postulate that 'people's lives are not shaped by text as much as it is shaped by context' (1997: 44). While the point may appear pedantic, it highlights the lack of systematic thinking and thoroughness in Esack's work insofar as he doesn't account for such antinomies and subtleties. For instance, when thinking about the present situation, what is the nature of the relationship between the interpreter's inner condition (individuality and subjectivity) and her external environment (colonial, racial capitalist, nationalist, Africanist, etc.)? this relationship could be characterised as either, neither or a combination of the following forms, non-linear, complex, dissonant, asymmetrical or other. How will this relationship define context and influence the reader-oriented interpretation?

The other question pertains to symmetry and couplet underdetermination/overdetermination. Underdetermiation is the simple idea that the evidence available to us at a given time may be insufficient to determine what beliefs we should hold in response to it. Overdetermination refers to multiple coexistent and complexly integrated structures, non-transparent modes in which certain types of activity express themselves. How is a configuration/gestalt abstracted from this complex multitude to appropriately describe the operative context? Esack doesn't engage this situation but instead relies on a form of naïve empiricism which implies we can easily ascertain the nature and efficacy of context.

Esack does not theoretically acknowledge the determination/overdeterminatiion couplet, but, intuits the hazards implicit in an unqualified pluralism. He purportedly attempts to curb the endless 'pleasures of difference without ever committing oneself' (1997, 78) by recourse to the question 'for whom and in whose interests' (ibid.). This simple rhetorical question is

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misleading. Esack implies he has the answers or that the answers are easily forthcoming. We have demonstrated 1) the complex socio-rhetoric climate in which Esack makes these assertions, 2) the many political, theoretical and organizational inconsistencies in Esack's theopolitical discourse. Based on his simplistic empiricism, blatant partisan ideology and verticalist/arborescent politics, as the analysis has shown Esack is unable to provide a cogent let alone an authentic subaltern response to the question.

Symmetry refers to systemic compatibility between the contemporary model of the interpretative milieu and the historical abstraction of the originary context. How will the critical factors and relations within the present abstraction be determined, and how will this configuration be surjectively mapped on to the earlier model and be refracted through the Quran to establish a plausible theopolitical argument and strategy for change? This problem occurs in several forms and in places in Esack's thesis. Throughout his campaign Esack refers repeatedly to the abomination of racial, gender, and socio-economic oppression that has to be abolished. First, in the absence of a lucidly articulated social ontology, what model of contemporary society and history is Esack working with? Is it, despite his denials, a mere liberal model? Is it a radical Marxist model? Is it a radical islamist model? Is it an organic subaltern model? The problem should be plain. If Esack cannot provide a politically and philosophically coherent ontological model of his own historical conjuncture, it is unlikely that his historical abstractions of the past and the necessary transhistorical mappings required to propose a plausible hermeneutic argument would be substantive and verifiable. ?

Esack's disinclination to develop a substantive and coherent hermeneutic cannot be attributed to ability. Given Esack's vacillating populist politics, it would be plausible to see in a pliable form of an *aporetic* and inchoate hermeneutic a more utilitarian tool for political expedience. The latter is actually conceded by Esack in his 2012 interview.

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Put into perspective, the dramatic and rapid estrangement of Esack and his ‘progressive Islamists’ from ‘ordinary Muslims and the subaltern generally almost immediately after the unbanning of the broad resistance movement, raises serious questions about their personal, and political calculus and organizational praxes. There appears to have been several divides between them and the molecular, horizontal, prefigurative and genuinely participatory vernacular praxes of ordinary people. Esack, and the ’progressive Islamists’, notwithstanding their artful appropriation of radical rhetoric, capitulated too easily, despite a long and rich national and international subaltern horizontalist political legacy and praxis, to individualistic values, vanguardist logic and, by unqualified affiliation and implication, neoliberal capitalist axiomatics of the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa.

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Conclusion

At the outset of this study it was clearly stated that the focus is not on idiosyncratic biographical detail. Rather, it undertook to unravel the way in which idiosyncrasy refracts the discursive and historical dynamics that inform and delimit Esack's articulation of ILT. This approach did not deny personal agency. It adopted the view that structure and agency are: '… existentially interdependent but essentially distinct. Society is both the ever-present *condition* and continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency' (Baskhar, 2009: 83). Subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes.

This study showed that Esack's ILT intervention has at least two basic, albeit composite, dimensions, theopolitics and hermeneutics. He attempts to expose and destabilise the apathy and hubris of the local theocracy of his time, by devising a credible quran-based alternative to their elementary positivist knowledge-power-politics codification. According to Esack, the general consequences of this apathetic theocratic approach promoted ritualism and exclusivism. I argued that because the spectacle of politics is much more rewarding and dramatic than the spectacle of hermeneutics, Esack's hermeneutics remains subject to the quirks of his politics and the expected consequences of such a subordinate relationship. Even though Esack alludes to reified Islam, his chief concern was local Islam's exclusivism, hence his dogged 'interreligious solidarity' slogan. In apartheid SA, any form of cultural or ideological identification which actually or potentially undermined the unity of the disfranchised was deemed abominable. This inclusive/exclusive tension in the heart of a political cauldron where the authoritarian populism of the ANC was hegemonic, appears to have persuaded Esack to emphasise the 'Plural' at the expense of 'Quran' and 'Liberation'.

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The study argued that in this process, Esack at times wittingly compromised theoretical and intellectual integrity and subaltern political praxis.

The thrust of Esack's theopolitical campaign was to demonstrate the egalitarian enlightened humanist and inclusivist nature of non-reified Islam as distinct from and opposed to the dominant model of the time. The praxis and calculus through which Esack actualised his ILT refracts/dispersed the particular historical and cultural choices he made and the delimiting, though not inevitable, consequences thereof. Despite Esack's proletarian provenance and the occasional token radical slogan, his praxis was circumscribed, as evinced in this study, by the axiomatics of spectacle and verticality. In the highly charged socio-political turbulence of the era, this acquired habitus, with all its partisan, *realpolitik* and cognate overtones, was easier to assimilate than to question.

I attempted to show that Esack's hermeneutics and his attitude towards the rich, variegated and nuanced intellectual legacy of Islam are highly problematic. In his enthusiasm to counter the stifling apathy and ossification of the reigning, mainly local, Islamic discourse of the period, he juggles a whole host of, implied and expressed, populist and intellectual floating signifiers - the people, text/context, dialectic/dilemma, relativism, justice, constructivism, pluralism and so forth. These unanchored signifiers are scattered and deployed eclectically across his discourse depending on the political needs of the moment. The effects of his political calculus – a basket of floating signifiers tethered to an authoritarian populist discourse and an arborescent praxis - are several fold. His hermeneutics are aporetic and seriously inchoate. His treatment of the Islamic intellectual legacy is flagrantly specious. His facile dismissal of the exuberant multifarious Islamic intellectual legacy on questions of subjectivity, transcendence, text, history, politics, structure/agency etc. as essentialist (1997; 10, 63) is redolent of a

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rationality still captivated by the supercilious Euromodernist discourse. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, there are several schools of thought. They all present highly sophisticated onto-theological and epistemic arguments. Esack dismisses the legacy in a gross reductionist manner and relies instead on modernist intuitions and notions. His theopolitics, purportedly in solidarity with subaltern, is awash with verticalist praxis and an unavailing populist rhetoric. Esack seemed to have succumbed to the myth that if your slogan appeals and you are under the patronage of the hegemon, you do not need reflective equilibrium or to be coherent and conscientious. His relationship to the hermeneutics of the Quran, history and the many cognate concepts is tenuous because, as demonstrated, his notion of the transcendent, context, history, meaning, and subjectivity rely too much on an unarticulated empiricist doxa[120]. His politics, without the conceptual substance, theoretical coherence, and the basic grounded horizontalism becomes vulnerable to the lure of negative populism. In the context of the SA liberation struggle, the COI exemplified one of many such organizations which was subsumed by the authoritarian populism of the ANC.

The general socio-rhetoric terrain which this dissertation undertook to investigate is delineated by the nexus between ILT and subaltern decolonial rhizomatic praxis. Specifically, it interrogated the conceptual coherence of Esack's Quranic hermeneutics and the efficacy and reflective equilibrium of his theopolitical vision. It found that Esack succumbs rather tamely to the allure of *aporia* and expedience. The dissertation argued that, historically and theoretically, meaningful subaltern struggles do not require forced *aporetic* hermeneutics nor political expedience to endure, expand and sustain an emancipatory praxis.

[120] The learned, fundamental, deep-founded, unconscious beliefs, and values, taken as self-evident universals that inform an agent's actions and thoughts within a particular field. Doxa tends to favor the particular social arrangement of the field, thus privileging the dominant and taking their position of dominance as self-evident and universally favorable. Therefore, the categories of understanding and perception that constitute a habitus, being congruous with the objective organization of the field, tend to reproduce the very structures of the field. (Bourdieu: 1977)

In chapter one, I retrieved the salient features of the milieu in negotiation with which Esack unfolded his ILT. Two concepts were deployed; IS and SRA. The application of these concepts also demarcate two discernible phases in his personal odyssey. Image-Schemata, birth to the age of thirteen, 'emphasize the bodily, sensory motor nature of various structures of our conceptualization and reasoning' (Johnson, 2005, 18) which 'exist as continuous and analogue patterns beneath conscious awareness, prior to and independently of other concept's (Hampe, 2005, 2). Socio-Rhetoric Archaeology, the period in Esack's life from the age 14 – 42, refers to the entangled and intersecting socio-political discourses and narratives which emerged from and responded to the social history Esack's thoughts refract. The chapter recognised and integrated Esack's early proletarian experiences with the broader historical and cultural dynamics his trajectory traversed.

The following chapter, two, is partially premised on the assumption that Esack's IS and SRA phases provide critical traces which influence the 'adaptive or fitness landscape' in terms of which his subsequent coping and negotiating repertoire was shaped. It had three primary objectives. One, it reconstructed Esack's basic conception of hermeneutics. Two, it critically interrogated both the explicit and implicit notions and concepts which buttress and motivate his arguments. Three, it examined and evaluated the semantic, conceptual and logical coherence of his theory. In particular, it problematized Esack's excessive reliance upon unqualified relativism and reader-oriented hermeneutics and the implicit liberal enlightenment notion of subjectivity and simplistic empiricism which undergirds the former.

In addition to his theory of Quranic hermeneutics, chapter three shows how Esack attempts to codify the outcome of the difficult dialogue between Muslim activists, the Quran and the swirling socio-rhetoric dynamics of the anti-apartheid struggle. The result of this codification he calls the three pairs of hermeneutical keys. Although all the keys are interwoven, they are defined with reference to, one, 'moral and doctrinal criteria', two, the 'location of interpretive

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activity', and, three, 'method and ethos'. Together, Esack claims, they help to 'shape a contextual understanding of the word of God in an unjust society'. (1997; 86-7). In discussing the three pairs of hermeneutical keys, this chapter had four foci. One, it acknowledges the contribution some aspects of Esack's argument here will make to the evolving liberatory decolonial archive. Two, it exposes the glaring semantic and logical inconsistencies of his arguments. Three, it problematizes his tenuous claims and reasoning based on 'anthropomorphic reification' and Mill's critique of apriorism. Four, it argues that his persistent use of 'floating signifiers' allows(ed) legitimate populism to be more easily annexed by the neoliberal version.

Chapter four argued that Esack's assiduous archaeology and rearticulation of the pivotal signifiers Islam, *iman*, *din*, and *kufr* to a more perennialist personalist paradigm is helpful and commendable in developing an inclusivist humanitarian reading of the Quran. It showed, however, that the merits of this argument are compromised by a tenuous methodology and an increasingly intrusive verticalist political praxis, both of which undermine subaltern interests. The chapter demonstrated the methodological problems that appear to plague Esack's pivotal signifiers. First, in his critique of, what he terms, the exclusivist exegeses of traditional Muslim scholarship, he blithely cites from, literally only one or two, western scholars whose Eurocentric methodological and epistemic sensibilities he never questioned. Second, his approach to intertexture and management of the intersectional dynamics between text, history, discourse and ideology is haphazard. Third, as a protagonist of situation-bound reading, Esack, ironically, utilizes Muslim traditional interpretations in a disembodied manner when it suits him. His semantic and syntactic analyses of Quranic terms and narratives, for example, *Mustadafun* and the Exodus paradigm (1997: 98-103; 195-203) suggest a garbled deployment of the material. For example the role and status of the *Mustadafun* is highly

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nuanced. Esack does not attach any significance to these variations. Instead he focuses only on the aspect which serves his argument.

Chapter five deconstructed Esack's theopolitics by juxtaposing subaltern sensibilities with the tone and political calculus of his socio-rhetoric interventions. It showed that Esack's unanchored political rhetoric and a praxis entranced by spectacle was easily subsumed (Esack, 1997: 234-5) and colonised by the slipstream of the ANCs neoliberal populism. It argued that Esack's theosophical superficiality, increasing alienation from subaltern realities and vernacular thought, personal vulnerability and individualistic caprice predisposed(s) him to a verticalist politics and state fetishism.

Esack's personal, political and intellectual odyssey is a telling yet tragic one. It epitomises the violent, often contradictory, internal ethical and psychological impulses engendered by a life which commences on the margins, is ambivalently mesmerised by the 'mixed metaphors' of petty bourgeoisie ostentation, and increasingly alienated from but stubbornly stigmatised by social provenance.

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In an attempt to understand Esack's challenges, we consider the following depictions of parallel milieux. Around the same time Black Skin White Masks was published, Ralph Ellison described the United States as a "nation of ethical schizophrenics" whose pathology of racism "was deeply imbedded in the American ethos." (1964; 99). It forced the Black "into an inner world," he said, "where reason and madness mingle with hope and memory and endlessly give birth to nightmare and to dream" (1964; 100). For Fanon, this zone of the "Invisible Man" is the zone of nonbeing, a "veritable hell." The "extraordinarily sterile and arid region" is more existential nightmare and yet, there is a dream that from here "a genuine new departure can emerge" (Gibson, 2008: xii). Some of Esack's impulsive individual ideological ironies,

paradoxes and aporia identified in this dissertation can be viewed with a little more empathy if read against a similar backdrop.

QLP is a distillation of several epic journeys and passionate conversations both within the citadels of the self and the many inescapable [exterior] domains and discourses beyond the skin. Its subtext wrestles with questions of self, other, faith, ideology, social justice etc.

Esack's central topos is about a better world for all creation recounted in a tone, at times plaintive, at times sanguine. As a human being, a Muslim, a proletarian child and a partially emancipated nomadic adult Esack is entangled in several "webs of significance, aspects of which he himself has spun". In the struggle for a liberated SA and a better world, many visions and solutions were engendered and contested. These ideological tensions circumscribe the historical and discursive terrain of QLP both formally and at the level of the individual. QLP is in one sense Esack's story.

The central thrust of QLP comprises three components. First, it challenged the dominant hermeneutic of the local South African Muslim theocracy, circa 1970-1990, who promoted a quietist, exclusivist and elitist interpretation of the Quran. The alternative analytic proposed in QLP encourages a more politicized role for the Quran in everyday life and a more democratic hermeneutic. The other two components are in the dual corollary of the latter process; the Quran's emphatic commitment to social justice and a non-reified perennialist view of its key terms *islam, iman, din* and *kufr*. Esack's rearticulation of these key terms offers a cogent albeit selective and tenuous Qur'anic defence for inter-religious solidarity against oppression. Although the QLP analytic exhibits serious flaws, it represents a set of hypotheses which offers modest impetus to the broader debate on Qur'anic theosophical metaphysics, politics and ethics.

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Esack's theopolitical campaign, however, is continuously trammelled by a, seemingly inadvertent but stubborn, undertow of modernist logics and optics. The effects of this is most flagrantly evident in 1] his references to the Islamic theosophical legacy which often regurgitates pejorative orientalist stereotypes about Islam, 2] his ineptitude to provide a conceptually coherent or insightful explanation about the relationship between revelation and history, and 3] a political calculus informed by a) simplistic modernist models and sensibilities and b) a populist rhetoric without any organic grassroots base and subaltern discipline. QLP, nevertheless remains an integral part of the unfolding liberation theology archive in SA.

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